



The Interaction of Sound and Meaning in Qur'ānic Words: A Tonal Approach

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Abstract

Muslims believe that the Qur'ān is the Speech of God with all its sound and sense. The association of the sound with Divine speech triggers the anticipation that the sound and meaning in the Qur'ān have to be intertwined. This expectation is heightened since according to a vast majority of Muslim scholars, the most powerful facet of the miraculousness and inimitability of the Qur'ān (*i'jāz*) is the aesthetic excellence of its eloquence (*balāḡah*) and articulacy (*fasāḥah*). And intriguingly, in parallel to the intricate relationship of sound and meaning, the attempts of Muslim rhetoricians to identify the source and enchantment of Qur'ānic eloquence have been developed around, and challenged by the distinction of meaning (*ma'nā*) and expression (*lafẓ*), which has long continued to be a most elusive problem. In this connection, there are several significant contemporary studies such as of Michael Sells and Kristina Nelson, which develop the traditional analysis further by charting the aural structures of Qur'ānic passages on the basis of the parallelisms and divergencies of syntactic, phonological, and rhythmic features, which are interpreted through the musical tonal dynamics. And the ways in which the aural structures become distinct of each other are read in parallel with the generation of Qur'ānic meanings. These studies construct a fertile formal framework for sound-meaning interaction, without, however, focusing upon how they are instantaneously correlated. In this regard, we encounter a unique work of Sayyid Quṭb, *Artistic Imagery in the Qur'ān*, in which Quṭb propounds that the fundamental principle and the most valuable stylistic quality of Qur'ānic language is artistic imagery (*taswīr*), through which the meanings are depicted and portrayed in a vividly evocative way kindling the feeling that the Qur'ānic expression is “alive”. As a crucial dimension of *taswīr*, Quṭb suggests that the tonal and articulatory features of the letters depict the meanings of the words, and the ways in which they are sequenced generate unique styles of inner musicality that portray the moods and atmospheres of the passages. However, in his cursory discussion, Quṭb does not explain what these tonal qualities are, and how they work. This dissertation develops the concept of *taswīr* around the concept of tonality and investigates the sound-meaning relationship by meticulously dissecting the articulatory dynamics of the letters and their expressive and evocative qualities.

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Transliterations

Arabic consonants

ا	a	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	‘a
ث	th	غ	ḡ
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	ḏ	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	و	w
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	ṣ		
ض	ḍ		

Arabic vowels

ا	a - ā
و	u - ū
ي	i - ī

1. Introduction

The sound quality of the Qur'ān has conventionally been regarded by Muslim scholars as an inseparable and miraculous aspect of the Divine Speech. However, the relationship of such sound quality to Qur'ānic meanings has historically become an elusive problem for Muslim scholars and rhetoricians, many of whom have attempted to solve this problem by prioritizing the eloquent arrangement of meanings upon which the aural aesthetic qualities of the expression are ornamentally dependent (Nursi 2008). In addition to this traditional position of Muslim rhetoricians, only a few explanations have been offered to this most central yet nebulous subject in modern and contemporary Qur'ānic scholarship. In this regard, this dissertation, first, discusses various approaches to this intricate issue of sound-meaning interaction, which, revolve around a key musical concept, tonality. And second, it propounds a tonal approach which meticulously dissects the inner musical dynamics of the distinct articulatory and phonetic qualities of the letters and their expressive and evocative functions.

1.1. The Enchantment of the Qur'ān

The cultural sphere of the Arabs before Islam, as a shared characteristic of Semitic history, indicates the prevalence of an oral tradition. The language is a conspicuous cultural hallmark, and the oratory, eloquent speech, rhetorics, and poetry had powerful area of influence. In comparison to written culture, the tongue and the ear work more responsive to nuances and subtleties of sound, and there is a wider space for aural, acoustic, and articulatory imagination. The role of illiteracy intensifies the astute perception of sound even further. When the Qur'ān comes into this picture, early accounts of *sīra* (prophetic biography) depicts the Meccans' first reception of the Qur'ān as an astonishing and enthralling experience. Various reports present that many of the Muslims were captivated and joined Islam through overwhelming effects. Those who had rejected the prophecy of the Prophet Muhammad are also portrayed to be influenced no less than the Muslims. A variety of Qur'ānic verses depict their inner struggle and perplexity, such as:

“Behold, [when Our messages are conveyed to one who is bent on denying the truth,] he reflects and meditates [as to how to disprove them] - and thus he destroys himself, the way he meditates: yea, he destroys himself, the way he meditates! And then he looks [around for new arguments], and then he frowns and glares, and in the end, he turns his back [on Our message], and glories in his arrogance, and says, ‘All this is mere spellbinding eloquence handed down [from olden times]! This is nothing but the word of mortal man!’” (Qur’ān 74:18-25)

Within this direction, as a concise remark, Navid Kermani evaluates the Qur’ān’s early influence on the Meccans as follows (2015, 49):

“To judge from the accounts of the Meccans’ reactions to Muhammad’s recitations as presented in this chapter, the Qur’ān’s aesthetic effect on its first audience (and the succeeding generations) was like that of no other literary text in the world. And even if we deny their authenticity completely, and read them merely as the invention of a later era, as an apologetic construct, it is still extraordinary in cultural history that the aesthetic reception of the revealed scripture takes on such outstanding importance even in the image that the later Muslims formed of the origins of their religion. No other text has given rise to so many extreme attestations of such an intense reception. Those who believed in its message found the sound of the Qur’ān nothing short of divine, we are told, while its opponents took it ‘merely’ as spellbinding magic. Even the latter classification, intended as moderate, indicates a powerful experience.”

1.2. The Concept of *I’jāz*

From the 3rd/9th century onwards, the enchanting influence of the Qur’ān had been shaped into the notion of miraculousness and inimitability (*i’jāz*) of the Qur’ān. In this regard, the eloquence (*balāḡah*) and articulacy (*fasāḥah*) of Qur’ānic expression have been considered as the most powerful signs of inimitability by a wide variety of Muslim scholars and rhetoricians (Nursi 2005). Apart from its widely acknowledged aesthetic

effect, a major reason that eloquence is linked with the miraculousness of the Qur'ān is rooted in several Qur'ānic verses known as the verses of *taḥaddī* (challenge). In these verses, the Qur'ān affirms its excellence in a uniquely provocative way challenging those who reject it to produce a chapter that is similar to that of the Qur'ān. For instance:

“And if you doubt any part of what We have bestowed from on high, step by step, upon Our servant [Muhammad], then produce a *sūrah* (chapter) of similar merit, and call upon any other than God to bear witness for you - if what you say is true.” (2:23)

The absence of a notable response to the challenge of the Qur'ān neither in the time of the Prophet Muhammad nor at the time of later generations formed a solid basis for Muslim scholars to conceptualize the notion of *i'jāz*. Besides, the verse quoted above and several other parallel verses became a central focus of inquiry in search of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān. In this regard, many Muslim scholars have argued that since the challenge is about producing only one chapter which is expected to be similar to any one of the Qur'ānic chapters, the inimitable quality should be sought anywhere in the Qur'ān. Therefore, rather than a specific content or subject matter, it is an innate quality of expression that is in question. This approach further encourages the meticulous scrutiny of Qur'ānic eloquence.

1.3. Tension between Meaning and Expression

The explorations of the source of Qur'ānic eloquence, however, faced a crucial challenge, that is the intricate relationship between meaning (*ma'nā*) and expression (*lafẓ*).¹ In an eloquent speech, what is the balance between the aural and acoustical harmony of the expression and the congruous and coordinated order of the meanings? And more importantly, what is the relationship between these two? As I shall discuss in detail, many prominent Muslim rhetoricians had discussed that the aural and poetic qualities

¹ The term *lafẓ* (pl. *alfāẓ*) stands for the linguistic signifier. It literally means “to throw, or to take something out from the mouth”, and refers to words with regards to the articulation of letters and sounds. Kermani suggests (2005) that the most suitable translation for *lafẓ* is expression. And *ma'nā* has been rendered as meaning, sense, content, sense content, idea and intention in various studies.

emerge out of the inner dispositions of the meanings and their arrangement. For instance, simply put, it is the connection between the meanings that demands and necessitates the use of rhyme, assonance, consonance or any other rhetorical figure. Having said that, it should be highlighted that the discussions on the relationship of meaning and expression do not extend to the relationship of sound and meaning. Rather, as Michael Sells (2000) rightly observes, the conventional analysis has been usually limited to figures of speech.

1.4. Aural Architecture of Qur'ānic Passages

In the works of various contemporary Muslim and Western scholars, the explorations on the relationship of sound and meaning in the Qur'ān has taken more methodical forms, which directly focus upon the literary effect of the sound itself. In this regard, perhaps the most meticulous studies are that of Michael Sells, which basically rely on charting the syntactically, phonologically, and rhythmically cohesive, parallel and divergent structures of the aural architecture. Other prominent writers on the subject, such as Kristina Nelson and Ibsen al-Fāruqī also characterized the sound-meaning interaction on this formal basis. In this framework, the relationship of aural structures to meanings is based on the ways in which the aural structures progress and interact with each other. And this interaction relies on the alterations and divergences in syntactic, phonic, and rhythmic parallelisms, which create tensions that seek resolution through the re-establishment of formal cohesion. Such progression of tension and resolution highlights the aural patterns and charge them with distinct tensional and expressive qualities which in turn underlines the meanings. As the dissertation will discuss in detail, it should be noted that the concepts of tension and resolution are two key dynamics of musical tonality. In the studies which chart the aural architecture, although the analyses are of a literary nature, the progression of aural patterns are mainly identified through these two musical dynamics, which might be interpreted as a literary application of inner musicality.

1.5. Aural Imagery of Qur'ānic Meanings

In the first half of the 20th century, we see a pioneering work of Sayyid Quṭb, *Artistic Imagery in the Qur'ān*, which puts forward a unique artistic approach to the miraculousness of the Qur'ān. Quṭb (2011) discusses that the foundational principle of Qur'ānic expression and style lies in artistic imagery (*taswīr*), through which the Qur'ān miraculously depicts and portrays the meanings in a vividly cinematographic way to the listener evoking the impression that the Qur'ānic expression is “alive”. Quṭb (2011) regards his work to uncover what Muslim rhetoricians for centuries have been struggling with. And in this regard, he critically suggests that their deep preoccupation with the distinction of meaning and expression prevented them to realize the artistic merits of the Qur'ān.

It is a crucial aspect of Quṭb's work that the sound is also given two critical depictive functions. The first is the depiction of the meanings of individual words by the tonal and articulatory qualities of the letters. This facet in many ways corresponds to sound symbolism. The second is the generation of the mood and atmospheres of a passage on the basis of its inner melody and rhythm, which are based on the tonal qualities of the letters as well. In Quṭb's work (2011), these two aspects of aural depiction create a bridge between sound and meaning, which suggests a solution to the polarity of meaning and expression. However, although Quṭb (2011) points out to the tonal qualities of the letters as the source of sound-meaning interaction, he does not elucidate what these qualities are, and how they portray the meanings.

1.6. The Melodious Recitation of the Qur'ān and the Science of *Tajwīd*

In addition to Quṭb's comprehensively literary usage, a similar concept *taswīr al ma'nā* (portrayal of meanings) appears within the literature on the melodious recitation. Nelson (2001) highlights that *taswīr al ma'nā* is regarded as a necessary component of the ideal recitation, which refers to the reciters' use of melodic modes (*maqām*) and vocal artistry in such a way to express the meanings. Perhaps the most critical quality of this concept as voiced by Labīb as-Sa'īd is that the Qur'ān has a “descriptive music” of its

own (Nelson 2001). In this way, it is the musical nature of the Qur'ān and as well as its meanings, which inspire the reciters' use of melodic vocal artistry.

At this point, one might be interested in the role of *tajwīd* in sound-meaning interaction since it is the most necessary aspect of the recitation. And when the sound quality of the Qur'ān is mentioned, *tajwīd* is perhaps the first subject that comes to mind, which refers to the systematic study of the distinct characteristics of the letters and the rules of flawless articulation, including a set of articulatory and textual regulations unique to the Qur'ān. It has been regarded as the authentic aural form of the revelation and has always been of utmost importance for error-free, authentic and artful recitation (Nelson 2001). However, even though *tajwīd* might crucially highlight certain aural aspects, these additional articulatory regulations need interpretation just as the articulation of each and every letter. Therefore, *tajwīd* by itself is not an approach to sound-meaning correlation. It is conceivably for this reason that *tajwīd* is not exclusively referred to by the scholars who explore the relationship of sound and meaning, but rather, it is treated as the standard oral rendering of the Qur'ān. Within this direction, this dissertation will also regard *tajwīd* accordingly.

2. Literature Review

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part explores the roots of sound-meaning relationship within the literature on the inimitable eloquence of the Qur'ān. It focuses upon the concept of *naẓm* (composition) and the distinction of meaning (*ma'nā*) and expression (*lafẓ*), particularly in the literary thought of 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. The second part presents and discusses the approaches of Michael Sells, Kristina Nelson, Ibsen al-Fāruqī, and Sayyid Quṭb on the sound-meaning interaction in the Qur'ān, and suggests that all these perspectives unite around, and rely on the dynamics of the concept of tonality.

2.1. Tracing the Roots of the Sound and Meaning: The Concept of *Naẓm*

A wide variety of authoritative scholars agree that the miraculousness and inimitability of the Qur'ān (*i'jāz*) primarily lie in its eloquence (*balāḡah*), particularly in its *naẓm*, which means the composition, arrangement and order of its meanings and words, in such a way that every part is connected and interrelates with all the others to support and strengthen the expression of a certain meaning (Nursi 2005). This strong coordination and coherence is called *jazālah*, which literally means “abundance”. In this sense, *jazālah* implies that the richness, resourcefulness and comprehensiveness of an expression depend on the perfection of the correspondence between the parts and the whole. The actual aesthetic caliber of an eloquent expression has been accordingly considered to rely on this perfection, in which the abstract and pure beauty (*ḥusn al-mujarrad*) manifests (Nursi 2008). The stylistic and literary devices have been regarded as credible and authentic to the extent that they reflect this abstract beauty coming out of the perfection of the trail of thoughts and meanings (Nursi 2008).

Let me illustrate the above-mentioned descriptions with an example. In his brilliant commentary on the verse, “If but a breath from the punishment of Your Lord touches them...”, “wa la'in massathum nafḥatum min 'adābi rabbika...” (Qur'ān 21:46), Said Nursi (2005) discusses that the verse intends to demonstrate the severity of God's punishment by drawing attention to the slightest manifestation of it. His interpretation

aims to illustrate how each word implies slightness and reinforces one another demonstrating the “*jazālah* of *naẓm*” (Nursi 2005, 392):

“The words *If but* (*la’in*) signify uncertainty and therefore imply slightness (of punishment). The verb *massa* means to touch slightly, also signifying slightness. *Nafhatun* (a breath) is merely a puff of air. Grammatically, it is a derived form of the word used to express singleness, which again underlies the slightness. The double n (*tanwin*) at the end of *nafhatun* indicates indefiniteness and suggests that it is slight and insignificant. The partitive *min* implies a part or a piece, thus indicating paucity. The word ‘*adhab* (torment or punishment) is light in meaning compared to *nakal* (exemplary chastisement) and ‘*iqab* (heavy penalty), and denotes a light punishment or torment. The use of *Rabb* (Lord, Provider, Sustainer), suggesting affection, instead of (for example) Overwhelming, All-Compelling, or Avenger, also expresses slightness.”

Another mark of *i’jāz* and a major rhetorical aspect that accompanies eloquence in the selection of the words is *fasāḥah*, which refers to the purity and clarity of articulacy, that is fluid, harmonious and free from discordance (Nursi 2005). In this way, in addition to the coordination of meanings, we find the coordination of *alfāẓ*. However, there is a critical difference of opinion among the rhetoricians with regards to the definition of the term. For instance, al-Jāḥiẓ considers that *fasāḥah* primarily lies in aural and articulatory purity that satisfies the ear, while al-Jurjānī is critical of such independent consideration of acoustic merit, and maintains that the value of *fasāḥah* is in the pure and articulate expression of the meaning, that is in the integrity between the intended meaning of a phrase and the arrangement of *alfāẓ* (Kermani 2015). This second description of *fasāḥah* is almost identical with eloquence (*balāḡah*), with the emphasis on the arrangement of the *alfāẓ* instead of the meanings.

What is the critical difference between these two views? In either case, the speaker is expected to maintain articulatory harmony, and rhythmic and tempo(ral) cohesion throughout the composition of all the selected words. That is not the source of controversy. Rather, it appears that the starting point is the underlying tension between

the meaning (*ma'nā*) and expression (*lafẓ*), and more particularly, between the sound and meaning. This becomes clear in al-Jurjānī's above criticism of the autonomous consideration of aural harmony.

In that case, how will the speaker select the words? The aural considerations might pull the speaker in a direction which might not be suitable for the meaning, and vice versa. A deeper exploration of aural and articulatory characteristics might further complicate this tension. The selection of such a word accordingly demands and necessitates an approach to the interplay of sound and meaning. It is evident that the notions of *naẓm* (composition) and *jazālah* (perfect coordination) provide a coherent approach to the arrangement of meanings. However, the arrangement of each and every sound, and the relationship of sound and meaning have not received similar attention in traditional analysis. In this framework, even though *fasāḥa* is significant for accurate, lucid and euphonious articulacy, it has not been systematically approached in relation to sound-meaning interaction.

It has been strongly maintained by Qur'ānic scholars and rhetoricians alike that every single word in the Qur'ān undertakes an inimitable role that cannot be replaced by some other word. Then we shall ask, does it not also apply to every single sound unit? If the sound is an indivisible part of the speech of God, then is it not also necessary to focus upon the composition of sounds in search of the aural and articulatory dynamics of the relationship of sound and meaning? Let me discuss these points further in reference to al-Jurjānī's approach to the relationship of meaning (*ma'nā*) and expression (*lafẓ*).

2.1.1. The meaning and expression in the literary thought of al-Jurjānī

‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (1339–1414) was a renowned Muslim rhetorician and literary theorist who is known for his works on rhetorics (*‘ilm al balāghah*) and the miraculousness of the Qur'ān (*i'jāz*), and perhaps the first name that comes to mind with regards to the notion of *naẓm* (composition). Margaret Larkin states that al-Jurjānī views the composition “as the stylistic embodiment of the mental prototype that dictates its verbal form” (Larkin 1988, 43). In this sense, the expression is nothing but the outward form of the meaning. The idea (*ma'nā*) and its expression (*lafẓ*) are

inseparable. Neither of them is independent of the other. A meaning cannot be expressed in two different ways. A change in the expression results in a change in the meaning. Thus, all the stylistic qualities of a composition have been considered to appear out of the dispositions of the ideas. Al-Jurjānī discusses that (Kermani 2015, 211):

“It is not the speaker who leads the idea to wordplay and rhyme; on the contrary, the idea leads him to these two stylistic devices and makes him hit upon them; so much so that, if he had wanted to substitute an expression without assonance, the sense would have fought against it, and he would have been forcing something strange upon it, and the speaker would have been as much subject to censure as one who put together tasteless puns and repulsive rhymes. You will find no method that is more felicitous and better from beginning to end, and no course that better leads to a good form of expression and more reliably commands applause, than to leave the ideas free to follow their own disposition and let them find the words themselves.”

In this sophisticated approach, al-Jurjānī suggests that the expression, including all its words and stylistic features, naturally appears, or shall appear out of the disposition of the idea without any necessity of further stylistic intervention. In principle, this is a perfect reconciliation of meaning and expression, however, al-Jurjānī does not seem to touch upon the actual problem. It is critical that the intrinsic unity of sense and expression does not necessarily explain how acoustic and aural aesthetic characteristics, or sounds themselves are linked with the meanings. At this point, the approach of al-Jurjānī to the arrangement of letters might shed light on the core of this challenge (Larkin 1988, 39):

“‘Arrangement of letters’ is their consecutive occurrence in pronunciation, where their arrangement is not required by a [particular] meaning, nor is their arranger following in it any track in the mind that necessitated his aiming at that which he aimed at in their arrangement. Had the originator of language laid down “rabada” in place of “ḍaraba”² there would have been

² The Arabic verb for “strike”.

nothing improper about that. The matter is not like that, however, with the placement of words, for in placing them, you follow the tracks of the meanings, and you arrange (*turattib*) them in accordance with the way the meanings are arranged in your mind. Therefore, it is a [kind of] ordering in which the situation of one part of it in relation to the rest is taken into consideration; it is not that kind of ordering that means joining one thing to another in a random manner.”

Here we arrive at perhaps the most critical and vexed problem about the sound. Al-Jurjānī argues that the composition of words follows the trail of the thoughts in which all the meanings are interrelated, whereas the composition of letters, and accordingly of sounds, have no such rationale. For that reason, even though the meaning and the expression are viewed to be intrinsically integrated, we find that the sounds, which constitute the aural, acoustic and articulatory fabric of the expression are excluded. They are denied access to the structure of the composition on the basis that their arrangement is contingent.

In this framework, however, if this is the case, then, how can one account for inseparable correlation between the meaning and expression, and for the ways in which stylistic qualities are necessitated and demanded by the dispositions of the meanings? This key problem has not been investigated in traditional rhetorics and by al-Jurjānī as well. Accordingly, it brings us back to the very elemental tension of sound and meaning. Al-Jurjānī’s view of the expression as nothing but the outward form of the meaning skilfully bypasses this problem, without, however, providing an actual solution.

To further elucidate this crucial complication, in response to al-Jurjānī, one might argue that, if we consider a word as a part of a composition and not in isolation as he exemplified for the verb “*ḍaraba*”, a change in the arrangement of the sounds in that word would obviously cause certain aesthetic shortcomings. For instance, a rhyme would be broken, the form would be interrupted, the character of rhythm and aural ambiance would change. Even though one accepts that the arrangement of sounds in isolated words is contingent, the sequencing of each sound in a composition has comprehensive aesthetic significance to the extent of altering the aesthetic cohesion and

integrity. At this point, it might be conversely argued that this is a hypothetical condition that never takes place. Since al-Jurjānī's approach to *naẓm* is rooted in the inseparable attachment of meaning and expression, he would have said that such scenario is irrelevant because what is important is the initial construction of a composition, in which such problem cannot occur.

However, even though it is a hypothetical scenario, it would still highlight the elemental problem. If we change the sounds of a word, and the speaker avoids to use that word seeing that the change in the sounds makes it aesthetically inappropriate, the speaker will have to rearrange the phrase on the basis of a purely aural aesthetic consideration. Accordingly, we might argue that, if the speaker does not use that altered word due to its aesthetic inadequacy, the arrangement of meanings is accompanied by purely aural aesthetic motivations that cover each and every sound unit as well. Therefore, if there is an intrinsic connection between meaning and expression, then the same connection must also apply to each and every sound unit.

It appears that, in the realm of traditional rhetorics, the horizon of the notion of *naẓm* has not penetrated into the aural aspects of individual sounds and their arrangement. Accordingly, the interplay of sound and meaning has not been elucidated. Rather, all the aspects of expression have been grounded upon the arrangement of meanings. And in this framework, the relationship of sound and meaning appears as a most central challenge.

2.2. The Relationship of Sound and Meaning in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān's aesthetic influence, its sound quality and the discussions of miraculousness (*i'jāz*) attracted many of modern and contemporary explorations of Muslim and Western scholars. Among these studies, there are several significant works which include key discussions on how sound and meaning work together. Here, I will build this section around some studies of Kristina Nelson, Ibsen al-Fāruqī, Michael Sells, and Sayyid Quṭb, whose works give us a clear map of the approaches to the relationship of sound and meaning in the Qur'ān. While the studies of Sells and several discussions of Nelson and al-Fāruqī concentrate upon the formal construction of aural structures, the

work of Quṭb focuses upon the depictive and evocative functions of individual sound units. As I shall demonstrate in this section, my literature review critically suggests that these two approaches revolve around a key musical concept, tonality, which provides a solid basis to study sound-meaning interaction in the Qur’ān.

2.2.1. The Concept of Tonality

In music, tonality is conventionally described as “an organized system of tones (e.g., the tones of a major or minor scale) in which one tone (the tonic) becomes the central point for the remaining tones. In tonality, the tonic (the tonal center) is the tone of complete relaxation, the target toward which the other tones lead”. In other words, tonality signifies hierarchical relations of tones, in which the tones move with different degrees of attraction and stability, and of tension and resolution towards the center, the tonic note, on which there is complete convergence and resolution (Benward and Saker 2008). Within this framework, it is the level of tension that generates the distinct musical meanings of the tones. Among the seven notes, the tonic note has complete stability, which gives the sense of centrality, foundation, and unification. The three of the remaining tones have varying degrees of tension, which charges and energizes them, and forces them either to move further away from the tonic, or to surrender to the gravitational pull of the tonic to find stability and resolution. And the other three tones have relatively stable and harmonious energies, on which the melody can rest for a while, and again, either moves further, or returns to the tonic for complete relaxation. Within this direction, throughout the following explorations of sound-meaning interaction, the three most repeated and significant concepts are center, tension, and resolution.

2.2.2. The Study of Aural Structures

To begin with, several studies of Michael Sells present a complex literary approach to the Qur’ān, in which the investigation of sound-meaning interplay plays a central role. Sells (1991) states that the relationship of sound and sense in the Qur’ān manifests itself through the dynamics of *tawāzun* (balance), which is rendered by Sells as “textual harmonics”, and correlatively through the distinct character of the *naẓm*. Sells (2000)

interprets the concept of *naẓm* as the Qur'ānic voice, and states that while the captivating influence of the Qur'ānic voice has been widely acknowledged, the link between that voice and the sound of the Qur'ān has not been deeply explored. Now, I will look into the article of *Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sūrat al-Qadr* to investigate how Sells approaches the subject.

2.2.3. Sound, Spirit, and Gender in Sūrat al-Qadr

Sūrat al-Qadr (the chapter of Destiny and Power):

We sent it (him) down on the night of *qadr*
And what could let you know what the night of *qadr* is
The night of *qadr* is better than a thousand months
The angels and the spirit come down on it (on her) by leave of their lord from every amr
Peace it (she) is until the rise of dawn ³ (Qur'ān 97) (Sells 1991)

The approach of Sells is built upon four integrated and interdependent modes of inquiry, that are semantic, acoustic, emotive and gendered (1991). The semantic mode broadly refers to the lexical, syntactical and thematic components of the chapter. The acoustic mode decodes the aural architecture by identifying the rhythmically, acoustically and phonologically cohesive and parallel structures. The emotive mode captures the markedness and intensity of certain sound units, and the effects of the changes in the phonic, rhythmic and syntactic parallelisms. And the gendered mode takes the grammatical gender of Arabic into consideration as a means of personification of the Night of *qadr* as a woman. The gender suffix *ha* (her) and the gender pronoun *hiya* (she) are interpreted accordingly. Besides, Sells (1991) also suggests that, as the other gendered suffix, *hu* (him) in the 1st verse, which is usually rendered as “the Qur'ān” might also be read to refer to the Angel Gabriel. Within this framework, as the platform on which these four modes operate, Sells outlines the phonic and rhythmic architecture of the chapter (1991, 246):

³ In many commentaries the word *qadr* is rendered as “destiny” and “power”. And the word *amr* as “affair”.

innā(ā) an#zalnā	hu //fī	laylati l-qader
wamā(ā) aderāka	//mā	laylatu l-qader
laylatu l-qadri	khayrun//	##min alfi shaher
tanazzalu l-malā(ā)'ikatu////	WA R-RŪḤU FĪHĀ	bi idhni rabbihim ##min#kullī amer
salā mun	hiya //hattā	matelā' i l-fajer

Key: e Anaptyctic Vowel (naql, itbā', qalqala).

//// Rhythmic Break

(ā) madd

Nasalization (ikhfā')

bold: first grid based on /ā/ dominate phonic cohesions

Strong Nasalization (ghunna, idghām)

underline: second grid based on closed syllables, rhythmic cohesion

// Syntactical Caesura

central section: central axis, aspirate dominated phonic cohesion

When the complete aural system of a chapter is identified, a new discourse appears. As I shall examine in more detail, Sells' phonological and rhythmic analysis aims to highlight that each verse has a center on which the acoustic, emotive, semantic and gendered "tensions" and "energies" are accumulated. And these centers with regards to these four interrelated dynamics develop and gravitate towards the center of the chapter and resolves on it (Sells 1991). This tonal description relies on various critical remarks about sound-meaning correlation throughout the article. However, although Sells' approach to sound and meaning clearly operates through the tonal dynamics of centrality, tension and resolution, he neither identifies such tonal line of thinking nor any other approach as a theoretical basis for the interplay of sound and meaning.

In Sells' commentary on *sūrat al-qadr*, we repeatedly observe such critical fragments of analysis which constitute the foundation of sound-meaning relationship in the article. It is significant to quote these remarks since I need to highlight the critical use of tonal terms.

1. "The closed and nasalized "nn" provides a **tension** and **withheld** energy that is **released** in the following /a/ in a moment of semantic-acoustical

intensity”, (nn of *innā* -We!- in the first word of the 1st verse) (Sells 1991, 247).

2. “The *hu*, **pulled** in one direction by syntactical rhythm and in the other by phonological cohesion, metrical rhythm, and quantitative balance, lacking in specified antecedent, becomes the **matrix** of semantic, acoustic, emotive, and gender energy within verse 1”, (*hu* -him- of the 1st verse *innā anzalnā hu fī laylati l-qadr*) (Sells 1991, 248).

3. “This **tension** and **centrality** are further heightened by the resonance of *hu* with other aspirates along the central axis of the sura” (Sells 1991, 248).

4. “Like the *hu* in verse 1, the second *ma* is in **tension** between a syntactical **pull forward** toward the second half of the verse, and phonological cohesion that **pulls it back**, and a complex quantitative harmonic that seems to **pull** in both directions” (2nd *ma* of the 2nd verse *wa mā adrāka mā laylati l-qadr*) (Sells 1991, 249).

5. “The meaning of *laylat al-qadr* is questioned, but direct answer is deferred. The *mā adrāka mā* ends in a deeper sense of questioning, rather than in any quick **resolution**” (Sells 1991, 249).

6. “The two phrases surround the rhythmical and semantic **pivot**, *khayrun*, with its spondaic weightiness” (Sells 1991, 249).

7. “But its central section, *wa r-rūhu fihā*, is left in an anomalous position, stranded as it were in the **center** of the verse” (Sells 1991, 246).

8. “...the phrase *wa r-rūhu fihā* is at the **center** of a series of **converging** semantic and acoustic pressures” (Sells 1991, 246).

9. “The semantic indeterminacy at the end of verse 4 results in a build-up of **tension** that is **released** climactically with the first two words of the final verse: *salāmun hiya*” (Sells 1991, 252).

10. “With the first two words of verse 5, it is as if all four movements⁴ come together upon the key **tonic chord**. Or one might compare the first four verses **to a network of streams, dams, and rivers, of tensions and releases of tensions**. The final **confluence** takes place at the beginning of verse 5” (Sells 1991, 252).

In these critical quotes, we catch the fragments about how the aural and semantic aspects of the text work together. It is of critical importance to acknowledge that the terms and the language Sells uses directly indicate a tonal line of thinking. Particularly it is most obvious in the last quote where Sells uses the term “tonic chord”, which is the foundational and central chord in the tonal system; and the terms “tensions and releases of tension”, which are the two major dynamics of tonal relations. Besides, in this quote Sells also clearly mentions that the final resolution of the *sūra* takes place in the beginning of verse 5. All the other quotes, as I highlighted particular words in them, have these clear tonal references as well. The 1st quote mentions how a tension and energy is suspended, then resolved in the next sound unit. The 2nd and 3rd quotes suggest that the suffix *hu* is attracted by two cohesive structures in opposite directions and so becomes a center for semantic, acoustic, emotive, and gender energies within the verse. The 4th quote again mentions “tension”, “pulling forward” and “pulling back”. The 5th mentions a semantic tension that is not yet resolved. The 6th states that the word *khayrun* is the rhythmic and semantic center. The 7th and 8th note that the phrase *wa r-rūhu fihā* is the center of the verse on which acoustic and semantic tensions converge. The 9th refers to a tension that is produced due to a semantic indeterminacy. And Sells suggest that, when all these movements and tension arrive at and resolve into the beginning of the 5th verse, the phrase “peace she is” (*salāmun hiya*), “the final confluence” takes place, which corresponds to the relaxation achieved on the tonic note. Particularly, the relationship of “peace” and the tonal resolution highlights a complete

⁴ By the four movements, Sells refers to the semantic, acoustic, emotive and gendered dynamics.

convergence of sound and meaning, which sounds the Night of *qadr* as a woman experiencing peace (Sells 2000).

This framework clearly indicates a unique illustration of tonal thinking and gives us a basis for sound-meaning interaction. In the article, there is no mention of musicality or tonality, but we might securely say that even though Sells presents “literary” analysis, his approach to sound and meaning is built upon a unique literary application of tonal dynamics. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is significant to shed light on this tonal setting.

Finally, as we clearly discern that the relationship of sound and meaning in Sells’ work heavily relies on a tonal frame, now we might address several critical points. Sells applies abstract tonal reasoning to a literary context by using phonic and rhythmic cohesions and parallelism, semantic tensions and resolutions, and gender considerations, which propound a unique approach to the Qur’ān. However, certain shortcomings occur when tonality is partially applied to a literary context. For instance, Sells had discussed that, “The *hu*, pulled in one direction by syntactical rhythm and in the other by phonological cohesion, metrical rhythm, and quantitative balance, lacking in specified antecedent, becomes the matrix of semantic, acoustic, emotive, and gender energy within verse 1” (Sells 1991, 248). In this example, as the chart of the chapter outlines, the first part of the verse *innā anzalna* is marked by phonic cohesion, whereas the last part *laylatu l-qadr* by rhythmic cohesion, and *-hu / fī-* stands in the middle. Sells suggests that *hu* is pulled in opposite directions by phonic and rhythmic cohesions that surround it. However, what is critically missing in this picture is the phonic and rhythmic character of the entire verse(s). The ways in which phonic, rhythmic and syntactic parallelisms and divergencies develop throughout the entire verse(s) is significant for they indicate formally more comprehensive tension-resolution relationships within the formal integrity of the verses and passages. As I shall discuss, Nelson’s analysis demonstrates this point.

In this regard, Sells’ analysis remains partial yet still consistent in itself. It is partial because when Sells divides the verses on the basis of multiple incomparable criteria, such as phonic and rhythmic cohesion, the totality of the overall construction of the

verses and the chapter ruptures. It is consistent, however, since from these rupture points Sells demonstrate to us strong and congruous connections. I suggest that the reason for this complication is that, within the overall tonal framework of a chapter, multiple layers of vertical and horizontal parallelism and divergencies, and of tensions and resolutions merge with one another, such as formal, rhythmic, temporal, acoustic, phonic, emotive, semantic, etc., all of which pursue their own course of tension and resolution in a way that interrelate with all the others. These aspects work together in varying patterns, degrees and intensity, and the complexity of their interrelationship gives rise to various partial perspectives. In this regard, Sells presents us a fragment which consists of several facets of these overlapping aspects in *sūrat al-qadr*.

2.2.4. Nelson's Analysis of Formal Tension and Resolution

In addition to Sells' unique exploration, Kristina Nelson presents a more general discussion of sound-meaning relationship in the Qur'ān, in which once again the concepts of tension and resolution emerge. Nelson in *The Art of Reciting the Qur'ān* asserts that (2001, 13):

"Ultimately, scholars and listeners recognize that the ideal beauty and inimitability of the Qur'ān lie not in the content and order of the message, on the one hand, and in the elegance of the language, on the other hand, but in the use of the very sound of the language to convey specific meaning. This amounts to an almost onomatopoeic use of language, so that not only the image of the metaphor but also the sound of the words which express that image are perceived to converge with the meaning."

Nelson does not deeply discuss how the sounds converge with the meanings. Rather, this weighty concluding remark is presented after a brief yet crucial discussion on the form of the Qur'ān. Nelson (2001) mentions the cadential and unifying role of end-rhymes, and how the manipulations of rhythmic and syntactic parallelisms, and of the lengths of verses produce tensions that resolve on them. By means of this cadential resolution, Nelson suggests that the qualities of the text are highlighted, which catalyze the relationship of sound and meaning. In this way, the text moves through the

divergencies and parallelisms, and accordingly of tensions and resolutions, which charge the parts of speech with unique expressive tone and emphasis.

Nelson illustrates this with several key examples. In the following section from *sūrat al-shams* (The Sun), Nelson (2001) notes that the parallelisms of rhyme, rhythm, and syntax delay the final resolution the listener expects. And the change in the rhythmic and syntactic structure of the final verse generates a tension which then resolves again through the end-rhyme.

wa	sh-shamsi	wa	ḍuhā	hā
wa	l-qamari	idā	talā	hā
wa	n-nahāri	idā	jallā	hā
wa	l-layli	idā	yaghshā	hā
wa	s-samā'i	wa mā	banā	hā
wa	l-arḍi	wa mā	ṭahā	hā
wa	nafsi	w-wa mā	sawwā	hā
fa	alhamahā	fujūrahā wa	taqwā	hā

(1) Consider the sun and its radiant brightness, (2) and the moon when it reflects the sun!

(3) Consider the day as it reveals the world, (4) and the night as it veils it darkly!

(5) Consider the sky and its wondrous make, (6) and the earth and all its expanse!

(7) Consider the human self⁵, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be.

(8) and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of God! (Qur'ān 91: 1-8)

In addition to Nelson's brief comment, I shall further highlight several conspicuous details in this example. The passage might be divided into two parts. The first four verses are to a large extent rhythmically and syntactically parallel, except for two

⁵ Asad translates the word *nafsin* as "the" human self, however, that "the" actually does not exist in the word.

differences that produce subtle tensions. Rhythmically, *wa* of “*wa sh-shamsi wa (and) ḍuhāhā*” differs from *idā* (when) patterns in the next three verses. And syntactically, the 1st verse is different than the following three. The rhythmic tension produced by *wa* merges in the second part with *wa mā* patterns. And the syntactic tension of the 1st verse will be balanced by the following syntactic changes in the second part, and will totally resolve at the end of the final verse.

In the second part, in addition to these inherited tensions, we observe that the rhythmic and syntactic parallelisms are gradually modified further, and the tension progressively grows through three factors. First, from the 4th verse onwards, *idā* (when) pattern is replaced by *wa mā* (and what). Second, until the 7th verse, all the second words in the passage are definite nouns, such as *al-shams* (the sun), *al-qamar* (the moon), *al-samā* (the sky) etc. The second word of the 7th verse, however, branches off from this rhythmic parallelisms with the indefinite *nafsin* (self) without *al* (the). Third, as another peculiarity of this word, the final letter *n* of *nafsin* turns into *w* due to *tajwid* regulation and joins to *wa mā*, and it is accordingly prolonged as *nafsiwwww w-wa mā*, causing a rhythmic gap.

After this gradual and preparatory increase in tension produced by these three conspicuous divergencies, the tension dramatically expands in the final verse. This verse begins with *fa* as opposed to all the other *wa* openings. And most importantly, the phrase *alhamahā fujūrahā* radically interrupts the chain of rhythmic and syntactic parallelisms of the passage. By means of the internal rhymes of *hā - hā*, which is also the end-rhyme, the phrase protects its strong connection with the passage, and the tension does not go off the rails. Yet, the tension that accumulates on the word *fujūrahā* forces the form for resolution, as the parallelism of the lengths of the verses leaves very little space for further additions.

In this already heightened moment, the word *fujūrahā* is further important for another reason. Interestingly enough, there are only three *u* sounds in the entire passage. One of them is in the very first verse, *u* of *ḍuhā* (brightness of the sun), the other two are in the word *fujūr* (moral failings) of the last verse. Accordingly, when the long-held tension of *u* of *ḍuhā* merges with the word *fujūr*, as if it suddenly comes out from the depths of the

memory, it makes a subtle and intense shock, through which the accumulated tensions of the entire passage on the word *fujūrahā* merge with this shock and unite in the moment of the final climax. Here, the relationship between *duhā* (brightness of the sun) and *fujūr* (moral failings) seems to allude to this unification as well. The word *fujūr* literally comes from the same root of the word *fajr* (day-break), which means “to break and split”, referring to the splitting of the darkness and the appearance of the light. In this regard, the word *fujūr* alludes to breaking off from the truth. Accordingly, one might consider that *duhā-fujūr* unification illustrates the purification of the self from the moral failings and the illumination by and union with the light. It seems that this point is further supported as the entire accumulated tension and the shock upon *fujūrahā* intensely resolve onto the word *taqwāhā* (God consciousness), and particularly onto the end-rhyme *āhā*, which rebuilds the sense of complete equilibrium and harmony of the final verse and the entire passage in both aural and semantic terms. Conceivably, the relation between *duhā*, *fujūr*, and *taqwā* triad is even further reinforced in the following two verses of the next passage: “(9) To a happy state shall indeed attain he who causes this [self] to grow in purity, (10) and truly lost is he who buries it [in darkness]” (Qur’ān 91: 1-8)

Furthermore, the ways in which the tension and resolution work through the unifying role of rhyme and the variances of rhythmic and syntactic patterns are highly diverse in the Qur’ān. For instance, Nelson (2001) further points out that, sometimes the resolution is delayed by altering the length of the verses, as it is in *sūrat al-aṣr* (The Flight of Time):

wa l-‘aṣr
inna l-insāna lafi khusr
illa l-ladīna āmanū wa ‘amilu ṣ-ṣālihāti wa tawāsaw bi l-ḥaqqi wa tawāsaw bi ṣ-ṣabr

(1) Consider the flight of time!

(2) Verily, man is bound to lose himself

(3) unless he be of those who attain to faith. and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping the truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity (Qur’ān 103)

The role of altering the length also brings out the functions of horizontal parallelisms. In *sūrat al-aṣr*, the final words and rhymes, *aṣr*, *khusr* and *ṣabr* bind the chapter together. However, there is no vertical rhythmic or syntactic parallelisms in the chapter as it *sūrat al-shams*. At this point, horizontal parallelisms come into the picture. In the 3rd verse, the form and rhythm are kept under control by the parallelisms and repetitions of *wa*, and *tawāsaw*: *illa l-ladīna āmanū / wa ‘amilu ṣ-ṣālihati / wa tawāsaw bi l-ḥaqqi / wa tawāsaw bi ṣ-ṣabr*. At the end, the unifying role of the final rhyme appears and the verse resolves on the word *ṣabr*.

The following example of *sūrat al-takwīr* (Shrouding in Darkness) further points out to a different role of altering the length. Nelson (2001) suggests that the sharp change in the rhythm and length highlights the verse. These conditions indicate that under the unifying role of the rhyme, the changes in the length, rhythm, and syntax also charge the expressions with unique gesture and emphasis. Here, the phrase *fa ayna tadḥabūn* (Whither, then, will you go?) interrupts the form with an overwhelming question, evoking awe, sorrow and a deep sense of self-reflection.

wa mā ṣāhibukum bi majnūn
 wa laqad ra-āhu bi l-ufuqi l-mubīn
 wa mā huwa ‘ala l-ghaibi bi ḍanīn
 wa mā huwa bi qawli shaitāni r-raġīm
fa ayna tadḥabūn
 in huwa illā zikru l-li l- ‘ālamīn
 liman shā-a minkum ai yastaqīm
 wamā tashā’ūna illā ai yashā-a l-lāhu rabbul ‘ālamīn

(22) For, this fellow-man of yours is not a madman:

(23) he truly beheld [the angle - beheld] him on the clear horizon;

(24) and he is not one to begrudge others the knowledge [of whatever has been revealed to him] out of that which is beyond the reach of human perception.

(25) Nor is this [message] the word of any satanic force accursed/

(26) **Whither, then, will you go?**

(27) This [message] is no less than a reminder to all mankind - (28) to every one of you who wills to walk a straight way.

(29) But you cannot will it unless God, the Sustainer of all the words, wills [to show you that way], (Qur'ān 81: 22-29).

Such formal features also find precise correspondence in the melodious (pitched) recitation of the Qur'ān, in which the melody develops throughout the verse and finds rest on the final rhyme. In this regard, Al-Fāruqī (1987) mentions the elements of '*ilm al-badi'*' (the science of rhetorical figures), and suggests that what determines an artful recitation is the use of melody in relation to these elements, in other words, to the parallelisms and repetitions of formal, rhythmic and phonic patterns. This is how al-Fāruqī considers that the relationship between the textual harmonics and its pitched recitation. Moreover, al-Fāruqī (1987, 13) also draws attention to the tonal significance of the end-rhymes. The word "tonal" in the following quote directly refers to the musical tonality:

"Elements of *badi'* are marked by the repetition of tonal and durational motifs of varying lengths. These create repetitive cadential figures of "musical rhymes" to coincide with the literary rhyme or other form of sound repetition. Such a melodic cadence is sometimes called a *qaflah* ("closing, rhyme"), a term which evidences an association with the literary *badi'* it parallels. Each passage of elaborated but gradual melodic descent progresses to the *qarar* or tone of melodic stability in the scalar segment (*jins*) in use. There, at the end of the literary-melodic unit, poetic, melodic and emotional tension are resolved with a return to a tonal center and varied expositions of literary, tonal and durational motifs."

Accordingly, the discussions of Sells and Nelson indicate that the relationship of sound and meaning in the Qur'ān is based on the ways in which the formal construction works. The form is charted through the phonic, rhythmic, syntactic, semantic and possibly various other parallelisms and divergencies. And these formal interrelationships are given tonal dynamism on the basis of the centers and patterns of tensions and

resolutions. As al-Fāruqī discussed, the conventional style of pitched recitation resonates with this framework as well.

However, even though this framework generates a fertile ground for sound-meaning interaction, it does not focus upon the instantaneous and direct relationship of sound and meaning in individual words and letters. We have seen that formal structures progress with varying levels of tension and resolution, yet, this tension-resolution dynamism has not been explored within the words themselves. The formal dynamics that has been discussed present only a general picture in comparison to the complex sequencing of the letters and sounds. When the analysis moves from the level of wide structural categories to the intricate tonal textures of letter combinations, we enter into a highly complex territory of sound-meaning relationship. Accordingly, in addition to formal, rhythmic, syntactic and other elements of tension and resolution, what we essentially need to find out is the tonal relationships between the letters, and how they work in relation to the meanings.

At this stage of our discussion, Sayyid Quṭb's *Artistic Imagery in the Qur'ān* (*Taswīr al-Fanni fil-Qur'ān*) offers a unique literary approach, in which Quṭb (2011) suggests that the articulatory qualities of the letters depict (*taswīr*) Qur'ānic meanings. Although Quṭb does not specifically identify these qualities, the treatment of sound as a means to depict the meanings makes space for sound-meaning interplay in single words and letters. Besides, the term *taswīr* appears in the literature of melodious recitation as well, referring to the melodic vocal artistry of the reciter to convey and express the meanings (Nelson 2001). Within this direction, the following discussion centers around the tonal dynamics of the letters and the concept of *taswīr*.

2.2.5. Artistic Imagery in the Qur'ān

Quṭb (2011) argues that the first foundational principle of Qur'ānic expression and the most valuable tool of its style is *taswīr*, which, in his comprehensive usage of the term does not only refer to imagery, but also to the depiction of intellectual meanings, psychological states, emotions, and character typologies. The most significant aspect of these portrayals is that they are not mere illustrations but they present intensely vivid,

animated and “alive” scenes, in which the reader experiences and witnesses what the Qur’ān is saying. The ways in which the Qur’ān stimulates the imagination by setting inanimate words and sound (*alfāz*) in motion, and revives them, according to Quṭb (2011) give us a major dimension of miraculousness (*i’jāz*) of Qur’ānic expression.

Quṭb (2011) discusses that early Qur’ānic commentators had lost the chance to deeply explore the artistic and literary beauty of the Qur’ān as the field of *tafsīr* (exegesis) had been dominated by the discussions on jurisprudence, history, dialectics, and grammar. In the later periods, Quṭb only mentions al-Zamakhsharī as an exceptional figure who could capture some aspects of the artistic merits of the Qur’ān. To exemplify, al-Zamakhsharī in his commentary on the *sūrat al-fātiḥa* (The Opening) articulates that the first three verses step by step develop and gravitate towards the fourth. Al-Zamakhsharī says that when the servant begins by genuinely saying “All praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds” he finds a driving force within himself that prompts him to God. This force intensifies as he adds, “the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace”. It becomes more powerful as the servant voices, “Lord of the Day of Judgment!”. At this stage, al-Zamakhsharī asserts that this force reaches its peak and it becomes indispensable for the servant to turn to God by saying “Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid” (Qur’ān 1:1-4) (Kutub 2011, 44). Quṭb (2011) praises this interpretation which depicts the servant’s emotional progression. He argues that, however, even though some commentators could catch such points, they could not reach the comprehensive artistic principle behind them.

In addition, Quṭb (2011) also mentions al-Jurjānī, saying that he had come close to discovering this principle. However, his deep occupation with the distinction of meaning (*ma’nā*) and expression (*lafz*) prevented him to find the truth. This criticism also voices Quṭb’s general view of Muslim rhetoricians (2011). I shall explain why Quṭb considers that al-Jurjānī had come close to find the principle of *taswīr*. Al-Jurjānī discusses that the most subtle and hidden metaphor in the Qur’ān is in the verse, “...and my head glistens with grey hair...” (Qur’ān 19:4), “washta’ala r-r’asu shayban”, an utterance of the Prophet Zakariyya (Kutub 2011). The phrase literally means “the head is all aflame with hoariness” (Kermani 2015, 209). The verb *ishta’ala* (to take fire) is referred to the head (*ar-r’asu*), however, the grammatically peculiar usage of the accusative *shayban* (with

hoariness) is referred to the hair. Accordingly, al-Jurjānī discusses that all the worlds in the phrase are interlocked to each other in an indivisible way, which demonstrates a miraculous *naẓm* through a perfect unification of meaning and expression (Kermani 2015). That is how, according to al-Jurjānī, the phrase expresses “majestic dignity, the excess of loftiness, the fascinating awe that penetrates souls” (Kermani 2015, 209). In response, Quṭb (2011) says that if al-Jurjānī had taken one step further he could have reached the source. The beauty of the phrase according to Quṭb lies not in the *naẓm*, but in how the Qur’ān evokes the imagination with the utterance of a head taking fire with hoariness, which depicts an animated scene of hairs going white all around the head.

These two examples of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Jurjānī might give a preliminary idea about Quṭb’s comprehensive approach to *taswīr*. Throughout the book, Quṭb (2011) exemplifies more than a couple of hundred verses identifying various aspects and dynamics of depiction (*taswīr*). For the interest of our study, we will focus upon the sound, which is also given substantial depictive roles as one of these aspects. The sound is taken into consideration at two interconnected levels. The first is the portrayal of the meanings of the individual words through the articulatory effects of the letters and words, which according to Quṭb forms the spirit of the (inner) melody in the Qur’ān. The second is the generation and depiction of the atmosphere and mood of a verse, passage, and chapter, by means of these tonal qualities and the distinct rhythmic character of the melody (Kutub 2011). Quṭb (2011) notes that Muslim rhetoricians have deeply discussed *fasāḥa* (articulacy) and the ways in which the words are arranged, which however does not extend to identify diverse rhythmic styles and inner musicality, and their functions to voice the content.

Before I illustrate examples from each of the two aspects, I shall remind and emphasize two points. First, Quṭb regards *taswīr* not as a peripheral but as a principle quality of Qur’ānic expression, which signifies an almost cinematographic perspective of reading that demands sufficient knowledge of the context and sensitive imagination of the listener. Accordingly, the depictive functions of the sounds shall be considered within this overall framework and not in isolation. That is when the depiction as the dynamic of the interplay of sound and meaning becomes more lucid. Second, the following examples require sensitive and meticulous articulation to appreciate Quṭb’s suggestions.

Accordingly, the reader needs to articulate the letters in a precise and fluent manner suitable to the rules of *tajwīd*.

Now, let us first exemplify how Quṭb suggests that the tonal qualities of the letters portray the meanings of the words:

1. “And, behold, there are indeed among you such as would lag behind, and then, if calamity befalls you, say “God has bestowed His favour upon me in that I was not present with them!” (Qur’ān 4:72), “wainna minkum leme l-layubaṭṭianna fain aṣābathum musībatun qāla qad an‘ama l-lāhu ‘alayya id lam aku m-ma‘ahum shahīdā”. According to Quṭb (2011), the articulation of the verse restricts and slows down the reader, and particularly the word *layubaṭṭianna* almost makes him stutter, depicting a scene of foot-dragging and acting slowly.

2. “And the next morning he found himself in the city, looking fearfully about him...” (Qur’ān 28:18), “fa aṣbaḥa fi l-madīnati khāifa y-yataraqqabu...” In this verse, Quṭb (2011) says that the word *yataraqqabu* (watching/observing) depicts how the Prophet Mūsā watches around vigilantly.

3. “Remember [how it was] when He caused inner calm to enfold you...” (Qur’ān 8:11), “id yuḡash-shīkumu n-nu‘āsa amanata m-minhu...” Regarding the tones of the phrase *yuḡash-shīkumu n-nu‘ās* (He covered you with drowsiness), Quṭb (2011) suggests that there is a peaceful atmosphere of sleep like a soft blanket covering the emotions.

4. “Thereupon they will be hurled into Hell” (Qur’ān 26:94), “fa kubkihū fihā hum wa l-ghāwūn”, The word *kubkihū* (to be hurled) according to Quṭb (2011) illustrates the motion of being thrown into the fire.

5. “[or] one who is cruel, by greed possessed” (Qur’ān 68:13), “‘utullin ba‘da dālīka zamīm”, Quṭb (2011) mentions that the word *‘utullin* (cruel), which have sounds from the throat (‘u) and the palate (tu) portrays the wickedness and greed of the referred person.

These examples might be extended much further. Particularly, those who are acquainted with the articulatory styles of Qur'ānic expression would easily recognize that such examples can be heard all over the Qur'ān. The portrayal of the moods and atmospheres, however, is subtler than the interplay of sound and meaning in individual words. Quṭb presents various lengthy examples, I will only pick some key ones to give the idea.

To illustrate, first, in *sūrat al-nās* (Humankind), Quṭb (2011) suggests that the sounds of the chapter generate an ambiance of insidious whisperings and subtle utterances (*waswasa*). This example has also been conventionally used by various Muslim scholars noting that the alliteration of the sound /s/ voices the undertones of indistinct and subtle whisperings. Especially when the chapter is recited in a fast manner, this quality seems to appear more clearly (Kutub 2011):

“qul a‘ūdū bi rabbi n-nās
maliki n-nās
ilāhi n-nās
min sharri l-waswāsi l-khannās
alladī yuwaswisu fī ṣudūri n-nās
mina l-jinnati wa n-nās”

“(1) Say: I seek refuge with the Sustainer of men, (2) the Sovereign of men, (3) God of men, (4) from the evil of the whisperer, elusive tempter (5) who whispers in the hearts of men, (6) from all [temptation to evil by] invisible forces as well as men” (Qur’ān 114).

Second, Quṭb (2011) discusses that Qur'ānic chapters have distinctive inner rhythmic characters, which resonate with and voice the content. In this and the following example, Quṭb (2011) uses the term “wave” to describe the rhythmic and melodic progression. In the beginning of *sūrat al-nāzi‘āt* (Those Who Fly Out) Quṭb (2011) says that there is a short, fast and severe inner rhythmic wave whose strike is rapid, shudder is forceful and electrified:

“wa n-nāzi‘āti gharqā
 wa n-nāshiṭāti nashṭā
 wa s-sābiḥāti sābhā
 fa s-sābiqāti sabqā
 fa l-mudabbirāti amrā
 yawma tarjufu r-rājifah
 tatba‘uha r-rādifah
 qulūbu y-yawma idhi w-wājifah
 abṣāruha khāshi‘ah...”

“(1) Consider those [stars] the rise only to set, (2) and move [in their orbits] with steady motion, (3) and float [through space] with floating serene, (4) and yet overtake [one another] with swift overtaking: (5) and thus they fulfil the [Creator’s] behest! (6) [Hence, think of] the Day when a violent convulsion will convulse [the world], (7) to be followed by further [convulsions]! (8) On that Day will [men’s] hearts be throbbing, (9) [and] their eyes downcast...” (Qur’ān 79:1-14).

In contrast to this example, Quṭb (2011) suggests that the closure of *sūrat al-fajr* (The Dawn), which mentions Divine compassion, blessings, and peace, has a light and warm melody whose waves fluctuate gently.

“yā ayyatuha n-nafsu l-muṭmainnah
 ‘irc‘ī ilā rabbiki rāḍiyatan marḍiyyah
 fadkhulī fī ibadī
 wa d-khulī jannatī”

“(27) [But onto the righteous God will say,] O thou human being that hast attained to inner peace! (28) Return thou unto thy Sustainer, well-pleased [and] pleasing [Him]: (29) enter, then, my together with My [other true] servants - (30) yea, enter thou My paradise” (Qur’ān 89:27-30).

The examples above are cursory, but they can be extended much further throughout the Qur'ān. The most central point in these examples is that Quṭb's approach suggests that the aural depiction in single words relies on the tonal qualities of the letters, and the depiction of the moods and atmospheres are built upon the distinct rhythmic textures which emerge out of these tonal qualities as well (2011). Quṭb suggests that it is these tonal and articulatory features that generate the spirit of the inner melody and distinct rhythmic temperaments. However, since Quṭb does not specifically discuss what these qualities are, this framework needs further development.

Furthermore, we shall also note that Quṭb's approach to the aural depiction in certain ways corresponds to the notion of "sound symbolism" used by various Western linguists, which is the idea that phonetic components and vocal sounds carry symbolic connotations and meanings in themselves (S. Newman 1933). For example, the sounds *e* and *i* are said to be lighter, brighter and smaller than *o* and *u*. While conventionally various notable scholars like Ferdinand de Saussure had maintained that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is contingent and arbitrary, various other scholars had suggested that there are objective grounds for sound symbolism (Jakobson, Levi-Strauss and Mephram 1978).

For instance, Stanley Newman's (1933) experimental study on the associations of sound with magnitude, and darkness and brightness suggests that, magnitude symbolism of vowels is based on three factors: kinaesthetic awareness of the articulatory position of tongue (i, e, ε, ä, a, ɔ, o, u, front to back), acoustical frequency (i, e, ε, ä, a, ɔ, o, u, high to low), and as another kinaesthetic factor, size of oral cavity (i, e, ε, ä, a, u, o, ɔ, small to large). And with regards to dark-bright symbolism, the study suggests that the palatal consonants are bright and large, and the dental consonants are dark and small. Besides, voiced consonants are heard to be larger and darker than voiceless consonants. And the study concludes that "The basis of phonetic symbolism is fundamentally objective. The symbolic scale is constellated in accordance with such mechanical factors as position of articulation, acoustic resonance-frequency, size of oral cavity, vocalic length, consonantal voicing, and phonetic structure" (S. Newman 1933, 75).

In this regard, we shall also include Roman Jakobson's suggestion that synesthesia, that is the neurological condition of the intertwining of the senses, acts as a bridge between the sound and meaning by bringing the inner values of the phonetic features to life (Jakobson, Levi-Strauss and Mephram 1978, 10):

"The intimacy of the connection between the sounds and the meaning of a word gives rise to a desire by speakers to add an internal relation to the external relation, resemblance to contiguity, to compliment the signified by a rudimentary image. Owing to the neurophysiological laws of synesthesia, phonic oppositions can themselves evoke relations with musical, chromatic, olfactory, tactile, etc. sensations. For example, the opposition between acute and grave phonemes has the capacity to suggest an image of bright and dark, of pointed and rounded, of thin and thick, of light and heavy etc. This 'sound symbolism', as it was called by one of its original investigators, Edward Sapir, this inner value of the distinctive features, although latent, is brought to life as soon as it finds a correspondence in the meaning of a given word and in our emotional or aesthetic attitude towards this word and even more towards pairs of words with two opposite meanings."

Newman's study suggests that the relationship of sound and meaning occurs on the basis of a kinesthetic awareness of articulatory qualities (1933). Jakobson's point is significant for it suggests a further explanation that the aesthetic and emotional attitude of the reader acts as a catalyst between sound and meaning through synesthesia (1978). These two critical remarks resonate with how Quṭb conceptualizes the aural artistic imagery (*taswīr*). Quṭb had mentioned the articulatory effects of the letters, which is parallel with Newman's conclusion. And Jakobson's mention of synesthesia sheds light on how these tonal qualities are depicted in imagination. At this point, one might problematize the subjectivity of the reader. However, the success of Quṭb's work already lies in the recognition of the artistic imagery as the foundational principle of Qur'ānic style and expression. Therefore, it is not the subjectivity of the reader but the artistic quality of the Qur'ān that is in question. However, it is also apparent that since Quṭb only mentions and does not discuss the tonal qualities of the letters, the identification of

these qualities is necessary for more lucid and comprehensive application of aural imagery in the Qur'ān.

In addition, it is crucial that the framework above also responds to al-Jurjānī's problematization of the contingency of the letters in individual words. The aural artistic imagery suggests that the ways in which the letters are sequenced have certain implications. Even though a change in the composition of the sounds of a word might not alter the literal or denotative meaning, it alters the aural and articulatory qualities and the tonal, rhythmic, timbral, formal and aurally expressive dynamics. And such changes in the aural aesthetic character of a word changes the affective or expressive meaning of that word. For instance, al-Jurjānī had asserted that if the creator of language had said "*raḍaba*" instead of "*ḍaraba*", there would be no deficiency. However, the word *ḍarb* (strike), with the heavy, forceful and explosive *ḍ* at the beginning, and with the thick and fast trill of *r* and its legato connection to *b*, might be considered to evoke a fast-unified motion of a bold and powerful strike. *Raḍb* on the other hand, with a lowly accentuated *r* at the beginning whose trill is softened, with *ḍ* in the middle in a paused position, and with *b* whose plosion is absorbed, sounds much weaker and hollow.

2.2.6. *Taswīr al ma'nā* in the Melodious Recitation

Furthermore, in addition to Quṭb's discussion of *taswīr*, we encounter a similar concept *taswīr al ma'nā* (portrayal of meanings) within the literature on the pitched recitation of the Qur'ān. Nelson reports that *taswīr al ma'nā* is considered a necessary element of the ideal recitation, which refers to the reciter's use of convenient melodic mode (*maqām*) and vocal style to convey and express the meaning (Nelson 2001). In this regard, Nelson points out to the opinions of several renowned reciters on the subject. For instance, Shaikh al-Suwaysī states that "Reciting with melody is like giving commentary: he who recites with correct melody and has a basic idea of the art... brings the listener closer to the Qur'ān." Further, Shaikh al-Tablāwī mentions that "The basis of reciter's use of melody is meaning, and not custom or taste. He extracts the meaning for the people according to his understanding." And another prominent reciter Shaikh al-Khuṣarī

voices that “The reciter needs talent and vocal technique to bring different colors to different meanings. Not everyone can do this” (Nelson 2001, 64).

Within this direction, Nelson briefly mentions three perspectives on the melody-meaning correlation. First, she reports several accounts of Egyptian reciters about the distinctive moods of the musical modes, such as the sorrowful effect of *maqām ṣabā*, joy of *sīka*, awe of *gırka*, and how the reciters use them to musically render and emphasize Qur’ānic meanings (Nelson 2001). Second, with regards to the role of vocal technique, Nelson (2001) briefly writes about an anecdote of Egyptian listeners on the transition of a reciter from low-pitched and quiet volume to high-pitched and loud volume in the moment in which infant Jesus “stands up” and speaks (in the chapter of Maryam).

Before I continue with the third perspective, in response to these two points in Nelson’s discussion, al-Fāruqī takes the exact opposite position, and asserts (Faruqi 1987, 14):

“One salient feature of Qur’ānic recitation is its avoidance of programmatic effects. The melodic settings of the Qur’ānic lines are as abstract as the works of the Islamic visual arts. Changes in pitch, duration or volume do not correspond to or musically “portray” literary meanings. Textual repetitions are not coupled with repetitions of melodic phrases. Changes of mode or register and musical leitmotifs cannot be related to persons, objects or events mentioned in the text. Narrative or programmatic elements are singularly absent. Moods and emotions implied in the text are not represented by corresponding musical materials. There is no tone painting. Register, ambitus, maqam, jins, melodic or rhythmic motif - all of these may change during the course of a recitation, at a point of literary continuity or at one of literary disjunction. They seem to have no correspondence to poetic discursive content.

The discussion of the relationship between the musical modes and meanings goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I will only remind that Quṭb had discussed the moods and atmospheres generated by the inner musicality. In this regard, one might speculate that there might well be a connection between the moods

engendered by inner musicality and the moods of melodic modes. In synesthetic terms, it is plausible that the moods and emotions of melodic modes and accordingly melodic modes themselves might have inner rhythmic and temporal characteristics or tendencies. While joy might be experienced with a dynamic inner rhythm, a shock of disappointment that is followed by a deep sense of sorrow might pull down the inner tempo and rhythmic zestfulness. These speculations need further development and experimental inquiries.

Furthermore, Nelson's third account is perhaps the most significant. Nelson (2001) mentions Labīb as-Sa'īd's idea of "expressive recitation", and his emphasis on musical "intonation" (*tarannum*) as a means of portraying the meaning. Kermani (2015) also notes that according to as-Sa'īd the mastery of vocal technique engenders a "particular intonation" (*talḥīn khāṣṣ*), which highlights the meanings. Further, as-Sa'īd also mentions the "descriptive music" of the Qur'ān, and states that "it is that which pictures the meaning and indicates the idea by means of the inspiration of the melody and matching of the voice to that harmony which is between music and the meanings which inspires it" (Nelson 2001, 63).

The two key terms *tarannum* and *talḥīn* are critically rendered as "intonation" by the scholars, and these terms have further subtleties as well. *Tarannum* is a crucial word for it is mentioned in a highly regarded *ḥadīth* (Prophetic tradition), "God does not listen to anything as He listens to a Prophet beautiful of voice reciting the Qur'ān with *tarannum*" (Nelson 2001, 81). Nelson elucidates that *tarannum* refers to "a technique of heightened speech, closely bound to the text it supports, and distinct from vocal elaborations of singing" (Nelson 2001, 81). And the word *talḥīn* means melody, air and music, and particularly a music that is composed (Nelson 2001). In this sense, the term becomes problematic for the recitation of the Qur'ān. However, Nelson (2001) suggests that it is used by the scholars in the sense of a "musical inflection" of the Qur'ān, which refers to the modulation of the pitches. As-Sa'īd uses this term with an addition as *talḥīn khāṣṣ*, which comes to signify a particular and distinctive melody, mood and music.

Accordingly, when these two terms are considered together, the text-and speech bound quality of *tarannum*, and the unique melodic character of *talḥīn khāṣṣ*, they suggest that

the vocal mastery of the reciter depends on his ability to match and resonate with the inner musical intonation of the text. In this sense, as-Sa'īd's idea of the "descriptive music" of the Qur'ān goes hand in hand with Quṭb's description of inner musicality. And when we consider Quṭb's suggestion that the inner musicality is formed by the tonal qualities of the letters, we might suggest that *taswīr al ma'nā* (portrayal of meanings) also operates on the basis of these qualities, which are melodically interpreted by the reciter.

2.3. Conclusion

Until now, our discussion of various approaches in this section borders on and intensifies around one central uncharted territory: The tonal characteristics of the letters. I have attempted to demonstrate that the approaches to the relationship of sound and meaning in the Qur'ān either explicitly or implicitly centralize tonal thinking, which I discussed by highlighting the exceptionally critical role of the concepts of center, tension, and resolution. However, the actual and core realm of tonal relations, which are found in the qualities of the letters awaits further exploration. Accordingly, the next chapter will attempt to identify the tonal characteristics of the individual letters and their evocative dynamics by meticulously dissecting the tension-resolution dynamics within the articulatory and phonetic features of the letters.

3. The Interaction of Sound and Meaning in Qur'ānic Words

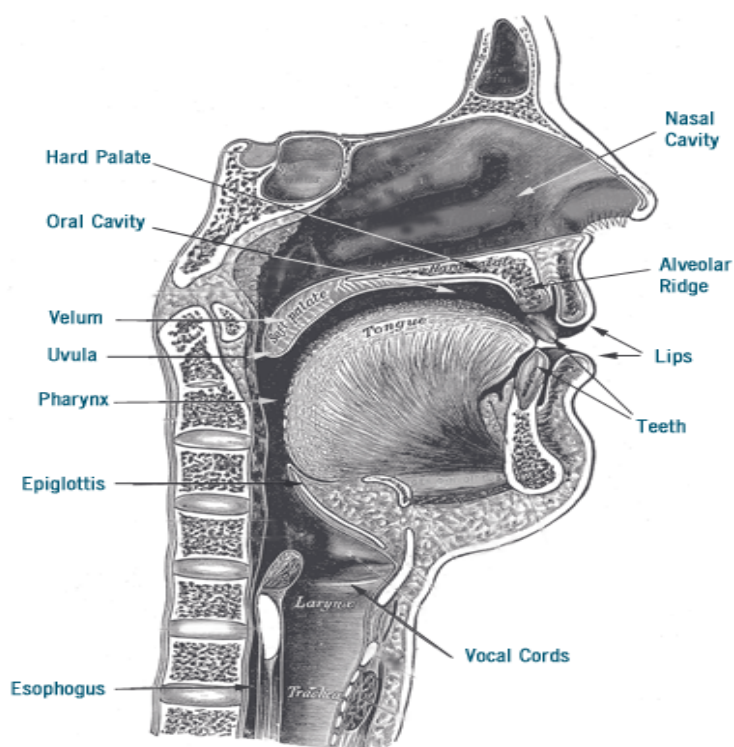
I have discussed in the previous chapter that the approaches to sound-meaning relationship in the Qur'ān is based on tonal thinking, which centralise the dynamics of tension and resolution. Sells, Nelson and al-Fāruqī used these dynamics by charting the form of the Qur'ān. Quṭb did not use these two critical terms, yet he mentioned about how the Qur'ān sets inanimate sounds and words in motion (2011). Besides, he suggested that the inner musicality of the Qur'ān and its depictive functions are built upon the tonal and articulatory dynamics of the letters (Kutub 2011). However, Quṭb did not elucidate what these dynamics are, and in this regard, the key question needs to be answered is that, if the pitch itself is not considered, what does it mean to suggest that the letters have tonal characteristics? Responding to this question, this chapter aims to develop Quṭb's notion of *taswīr* by exploring the tonal qualities of the letters and their evocative dynamics.

3.1. The Identification of Tonal Dynamics

The simple yet complex response and suggestion of this dissertation is that the tension and resolution, which are the elemental dynamics of tonality can be applied to the sounds of the letters on the basis of the tensional qualities of distinct muscle contractions of the letters during the processes of articulation. Similar to the ways in which the tones move towards the tonic/root tone for resolution, when a muscle is contracted it needs to resolve back, and as the letters are sequenced there are relationships of tension and resolution. Besides, the tones gain their unique tonal identity, function, and meaning on the basis of their tensional relationship with the tonal center, and accordingly, the distinct contractional qualities of the active articulators of the letters, which shape the airstream into speech sounds, might be considered to constitute the core tonal identity of the letters. In articulatory phonetics, the active articulators are throat, tongue and lips, which have distinct muscle tissues, and they involve muscle movements and contractions that give us the level of tension. And the passive articulators, such as teeth-ridge, hard palate and soft palate, are the ones through which the consonants are sounded, and their tissues mark the tonal colours and

timbres of the speech sounds. In this way, if we consider human speech production system as an instrument, the places of articulation of the letters (*makhraj*) might be considered as the places of tones.

Furthermore, in phonetics, the ways in which the active articulators interact with the airstream generate various manners of articulation. If the muscle contraction blocks the oral cavity and the airstream is suddenly released, plosive or *stop* consonants occur, which are *a, t, d, ṭ, ḍ, k, q*. If there is partial blockage of airstream as an active articulator gets closer to a passive articulator, *fricative* consonants occur, which are *f, th, s, ṣ, sh, kh, ḥ, h, ḍ, z, ẓ, ǧ, ʿa*. If there is a contact between an active and passive articulator but the airstream still flows out through the sides of tongue, these consonants are called *approximants*, which are *l, i(y)* and *r*. If a consonant starts as stop and proceeds as a fricative, it is called *affricate*, and the only affricate in Arabic is *j*. And finally, if the airstream flows through the nose, these are *nasal* consonants, which are *m* and *n* (D. Newman 1984). It should be noted that sometimes *approximants* and *affricates* are broadly categorised as *fricatives* as well (Gairdner 1925). In addition to the consonants, Arabic has three pairs of short and long vowels, which are *a, aː, i, iː, u, uː*. The following image (Donoghue 2016) and chart (Gairdner 1925) illustrate the places and manners of articulation of Arabic consonants:



Places of Articulation	Explanation of the Term	Manner of Articulation	Arabic Consonants	
			Unvoiced	Voiced
Labial	Articulated by the two lips.	Plosive Nasal Fricative		ب b م m و w
Labio-dental	Articulated by lower lip with upper teeth.	Fricative	ف f	
Dental	Articulated by point of tongue with upper teeth.	Plosive	ت t	د d
		Fricative	ث th س s	ذ d ز z
Alveolar (Velarised)	Articulated by point of blade of tongue with teeth-ridge (alveolum), together with the raising of the back of tongue towards the soft palate (velum).	Plosive Lateral	ط t	ض d ل l
		Fricative	ص s	ظ z
Alveolar	Articulated by point or blade of tongue with teeth-ridge.	Nasal Rolled Fricative		ن n ر r
Palatal	Articulated by front of tongue with hard (i.e. front of the) palate	Plosive Fricative		ج j ي i
Velar	Articulated by back of tongue with soft (i.e. back of the) palate (velum).	Plosive Fricative	ك k خ kh	غ g
Uvular	Articulated by extreme back of tongue with velum at uvula.	Plosive	ق q	
Pharyngeal	Articulated in the pharynx (i.e. the passage below the uvula and above the larynx).	Fricative	ح h	ع a
Glottal	Articulated in the glottis.	Plosive Fricative	أ a ه h	

3.2. The Process of Articulation

The dynamics of tension and resolution dominate the process of articulation possessing resourceful potential of evocation and depiction. The following discussion explores and outlines the ways in which tension and resolution might interact with the meanings. It first focuses on the basic tension-resolution dynamics in the process of articulation, then puts forward additional facets of *taswīr* and sound symbolism. It should be noted that the discussion constructs an extremely comprehensive framework that can be applied to every sound unit in the Qur'ān. Therefore, I will postpone the examples, and demonstrate them separately after the discussion.

3.2.1. The Major Dynamics

The depictive functions of tensional dynamics basically operate through two interrelated yet autonomous articulatory aspects: The level of muscle tension and airstream pressure. The first aspect is the muscle tension of an active articulator itself. For example, the back of tongue has high volume and low motional ability, and when it is expected to bend to articulate consonants such as *kh*, *g*, and *q*, it generates high tension. The point of the tongue has low volume and high muscular elasticity, thus, for instance, the articulation of *th* and *ḍ* generates much lower tension.

The second aspect of tension is airstream pressure. The airstream is either released suddenly and explosively as it is in plosive consonants, or it flows regularly in varying degrees of turbulence and friction as it is in fricatives, nasal consonants, and vowels. An explosive release of airflow evokes a strong burst of force depending on the level of pressure. Whereas regular and constant releases express continuous pressure. Within this framework, it should also be emphasized that the muscle tension and airstream pressure of a letter are not absolutely fixed, rather, the preceding and the following letters slightly yet crucially modify these qualities and generate harmonious or dissonant transitions.

3.2.2. Timbre

As an integral aspect of sound, the tissue qualities of speech organs, such as teeth, hard palate and soft palate, voice the timbre and tone color of the letters with rich evocative potential. The degree of density and elasticity, and therefore the reaction of a tissue is heard in the timbre which echoes the level of tension and pressure applied upon it. In this way, the timbre becomes an indispensable element of tension-resolution dynamics.

3.2.3. Gemination and Pause

Before we continue with the vowels, we shall briefly mention two distinct forms of phonetic stress, which are gemination (*shaddah*) and pause (*jazm*). These two factors intensify the tensional qualities of the letters since the contraction is held constant and not released. For instance, in the word *shaddah* itself, the consonant *d* is suspended in tension. And in the word *jazm*, the consonants *z* and *m* are in a position of pause demanding a higher stress. However, there are two exceptions to the increase of stress. The first is that as a regulation of *tajwid*, the letters *b*, *c*, *d*, *t*, and *q*, have the feature of *qalqala*, which means “bounce”. When these letters are in the position of pause, they are pronounced with a slight bounce. For example, *d* in the word *adrakā* is articulated as if it is *ad(a)rakā*. Or, *b* in the word *subhān* is articulated as if it is *sub(u)hān*. However, the vowels in parenthesis are not distinctly articulated, but just slightly touched to give the effect of bouncing. The second exception is that the letters that come at the very end of a verse, except for the letters of *qalqala*, are not stressed since the articulation naturally comes to an end.

3.2.4. Vowels

The evocative functions of the vowels need a separate section as they add another layer of tensional and expressive dynamics. There are three vowels in Arabic, *a*, *i*, and *u*. These vowels are indicated with vowel marks above or below the letters, which are called *ḥarakāt*, meaning “motions”. First, the mark of the vowel *a* is called *fathah* َ , which means “opening”. During the articulation of *a*, the mouth is opened with a slight descend of the lower jaw (Pakdil 2014). In this state, the air passage at throat and lips are all

open wide (Gairdner 1925). And there is no muscle tension and blockage in the oral cavity, which might portray an open, wide, flowing, and emanating expression of the force of tension of a consonant. It should be noted that in Arabic the vowel *a* is articulated in a thick or thin way depending on the consonant. And the description above covers them both.

Second, the mark of the vowel *i* kasrah ـِ , and it means “breaking”, referring to the breakage of airflow by the narrow and curved tongue-position in the oral cavity (Gairdner 1925). In this position, the lips and the throat are also narrower than that of *a*. Accordingly, this setting might depict a break and restriction of the straight expression of force. On the other hand, the limitation and narrowness might evoke intensification as well. Further, the way in which the tongue blocks the oral cavity is critical. The tongue, which has the highest elasticity among the speech organs, is bent as a whole in a highly soft manner filling the oral cavity. For this reason, it softens the consonants with higher muscle tension and relieves their tense expression. Besides, the fullness of the oral cavity suggests a high-pitched quality to the vowel *i* as well.

Third, the vowel *u* dammah ـُ , which means “gathering together”. It is because the lips come together and join one another (Gairdner 1925). In the articulation of *u*, the lips form a circular shape creating the narrowest air passage among the vowels. And the back of the tongue is raised towards the back of the palate, which is the narrowest position of the throat as well. Between these two narrow points, however, there is a considerable space for airflow within the oral cavity. The critical quality of *u* is that, as this voluminous airflow moves through the circular and narrow passage between the lips, the passage leaves no room for air to move in any other direction, and intensely “gathers together” “all” the flow. The largeness of the oral cavity whose airstream is vacuumed by the narrow and circular lips charges *u* with the sense of depth and magnitude. And the circular shape of air-passage equally gathers the airflow load *u* with concentration. In this way, with this vowel, the expression of a consonant reaches its highest intensity. In this position, a consonant is not openly expressed as it is in *a*, or it is not broken as it is in *i*, but rather, there is a deep, powerful, intense and awe-inspiring expression. It should further be emphasized that since the oral cavity becomes circular due to the lips, the muscular setting of the consonants accordingly become

rounded. It is a complex condition that this roundedness absorbs the sharp expression of the tensions of consonants and synchronizes them with the unifying expression of *u*, which cause consonants to become more mellow yet also more intense. These characterizations of the vowels discussed in this section obviously become more apparent and intensify when the vowels are prolonged.

3.2.5. Tonal Centers

After these discussions, there is a number of letters which we can consider as tonal centers, meaning that they are the places of complete resolution. The first is *a*. As mentioned before, in the articulation of *a*, there is extremely little or almost no muscle tension and the oral cavity, throat, and lips are all open. The absence of muscle tension gives stability and tonal centrality to *a*, and implies that it is the voice itself, that is later shaped into other consonant tones. The opinion of a large number of sufi scholars that *a* (*alīf*) represents the essence, the self (*ḍāt*), which sustains all the other letters seem to support this point as well. The second is the nasal consonant *m*. Like *a*, *m* also has no muscle tension. The lips are closed and stable, and the air flows out through the nasal cavity which is closed to muscle manipulation. Accordingly, this nasal consonant also becomes a tonal center. The third is *n*, which is the other nasal consonant. Even though there is slight muscle tension as the point of the tongue touches the teeth ridge, the air does not move through the oral cavity, but through the nasal cavity. And since the nasal cavity is stable, this light letter also gains the potential to be a tonal center. Finally, the fourth tonal center is *h*. The place of articulation of this consonant is the same as *a*. Just like *a* represents the voice itself, *h* might be considered to represent to airstream itself. In the articulation of *h*, there is no muscle tension within the oral cavity. Besides, *h* might consume the breath so easily, and when the breath is totally consumed, the central and stable quality of *h* appears more clearly. At this point, intriguingly, it should be noted that nearly 80% of the end-rhymes in the Qur'ān, which, as Nelson discussed, are the points of resolution, end with the letters *n*, *m* and *a* (Abbas and Fretwell 2000). *B*, *d*, and *h* are also used in various rhymes and they share the same place of articulation with *m*, *n* and *a*. The remaining other rhymes are somewhat rare. This condition strongly supports our characterization of tonal centers, which are the points of complete resolution.

3.2.6. Directionality

The muscle movements and the course of airstream express directionality. First of all, as the most active speech organ, the tongue has complex motional and directional ability. It ascends and descends, it moves forward and backward. Most of the consonants are directly articulated with the tongue. On the other hand, the throat has very little motional ability. And the pharyngeal consonants *ħ* and *ʕ* are also articulated with the tongue root against the pharynx. Besides, the lips also only have limited directional ability. In the articulation of *m*, lips are relaxed and stable; of *b*, lips pressurize against each other; of *f*, lower lip slightly moves back to upper teeth, and of *w*, lips form a circular shape. In this regard, if we demonstrate several examples, for instance, in the articulation of *i* (*y*), the tongue moves forward, and the front of the tongue moves up towards the hard palate, forming a curved passage for airstream to flow downwards. Or, the tongue moves back, and the back of the tongue moves up towards the soft palate to articulate *g* and *q*. Or, it moves back against the throat to articulate *ħ* and *ʕ*. It moves forward to articulate *th* and *ɖ*, etc. However, it should also be noted that the movements of speech organs have complex and even sometimes opposite directional qualities, whose interpretation depends on which part of the organs the listener focuses.

However, the directional motions the letters should be considered hand in hand with the vowels, since the consonants are moved and expressed by or through them. As I have exemplified above, *i* has a rising motion of tongue through which the airstream flows downwards. *U*, on the other hand, gathers and intensifies all the airstream in a directionless and circular narrow passage at the end of the oral cavity, evoking a concentrated straight motion and direction. Further, the case of *a* is rather unique. In the articulation of *a*, the air passage at the throat, oral cavity and lips are all open, which give us no specific directional clue. In this way, considering that *a* has an unobstructed and open-wide expression, spatial imagination suggests that the source of *a* covers all the directions.

3.2.7. Temporal Perception: Explosion and Friction

The ways in which the airflow is released might be considered to have temporal implications as well. While explosive releases of plosive consonants might evoke sudden and immediate acts and impacts, friction might depict processes and continuous effects. Explosion is intrinsically surprising, unexpected and destabilizing. It might be foreseen, yet the exact moment of explosion, in any case, unsettles the temporal linearity and breaks the patterns of familiarity in varying degrees. In this way, explosion evokes a moment of climax, unification, and transformation at the nexus of tension and resolution. On the other hand, friction implies process, whose relative quality depends on the airstream pressure and muscle tension. If the pressure and tension are low, temporal awareness might resolve, such as with *f*, *th*, *sh*, *s*. Conversely, if the pressure and tension are high as it is with voiced fricatives such as *ɖ*, *z*, *ʒ*, *g*, and *ʼa*, temporal sensitivity might increase. The exceptional category in this regard is nasal consonants, which have almost no muscle tension and airstream pressure. We have identified these consonants are tonal centers. Therefore, it might be considered that the temporal tension is entirely absent in a state of complete stability and resolution.

3.2.8. Spatial and Physical Aspects

In addition to temporal aspects, the level of muscle tension, airstream pressure, and tissue timbers might evoke various qualities of things as well, such as weight, size, liquidity, solidity, gaseity, heat, amount, and distance. For instance, the letters with high muscle tension and airflow pressure, such as plosive *ɖ* might evoke heaviness and therefore proximity in distance. And since the contracted area of the tongue is voluminous and fill the oral cavity, it might evoke largeness in size, and excess in quantity. Whereas, in fricative *s*, there is low muscle tension and the tip of the tongue might suggest smallness and lightness. Thus, it might evoke distance. Besides, since this consonant is articulated with the tip of the tongue with upper teeth, it expresses sharpness (of the tip) and solidity (of teeth). From another angle, sharpness and solidity might evoke proximity. Depending on the meaning and interpretation of the word, complex associations might be imagined.

3.2.9. Pain and Pleasure

Depending on the context, the meaning, and the interpretation of a word, tension-resolution dynamics might evoke pain and pleasure, and express the level of intensity of emotions. While the outburst of a plosive letter might be imagined as a sudden release and explosion of pain, pleasure or an emotion, a fricative might depict continuous effects. For instance, while *‘ibādah* (prayer and worship), which has the heavy fricative *‘i*, and the plosives *b* and *d*, might be exhausting and burdensome for some, it might also be full of overwhelming and eruptive pleasures for the others.

3.3. Demonstration of the Tonal Approach

The framework above might be applied to every letter and word in the Qur’ān. Here, I select five well-known verses to Muslims which contain a diverse range of themes such as creation, grace, faith, light, forgiveness, and wrath. In these verses, I will make a thorough and meticulous exploration with the objective of constructing a tonal approach to sound-meaning interaction in the Qur’ānic words.

1.

“bismi l-lāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm”

“In the name of God, the most gracious, the dispenser of grace” (Qur’ān 1:1)

In this unique opening phrase, the final letters of all the words are tonal centers with complete resolution: *ism*, *allāh*, *raḥmān*, *raḥīm*. And except for the first word, these resolutions are smoothly initiated by the prolongations of the preceding letters. The phrase also begins with *b*, whose place of articulation is the same with the tonal center *m*. In this way, the phrase maintains a strong sense of stability. Besides, in three stages the phrase expresses a descending motion, marked by the alternations between the vowels *i* and *a*, and attains total resolution at the end of the phrase. Now, I will dissect the phrase from end to beginning.

The Dispenser of Grace

The word *rahīm* begins with a rapid trill of *r* that is further strengthened by the preceding word's connection to *r*. The uniqueness of *r* is that it is the only letter in whose articulation the tongue itself vibrates (trill). Further, the letter *h* has high muscle tension and airflow pressure. And the word closes with the letter *m*, which is a tonal center with almost no tension. Besides, the word *rahīm* is a harmonious word for none of the letters block one another and necessitate extra muscular effort and tension.

If we related this setting to the meaning of the word “the dispenser of grace” or “the most compassionate”, the trill of *r* evokes rapid, urgent, dynamic and constant manifestation of compassion, which is expressed with the thick and open-wide quality of the vowel *a*. The letter *h* expresses a highly intense, pressured and heated sense of compassion, whose intensity is further increased by the narrow air-passage of the prolonged vowel *i*, which, however, also gives the necessary softness to the expression. Then, this highly charged movement resolves onto the letter *m*, depicting a moment of embrace and relaxation. And the tension that necessitated and attracted such compassion finds peace and stability.

The Most Gracious

The word *rahīmān* is in many ways similar to *rahīm*. The condition of the trill *r* at the beginning is the same. The letter *h* is in a paused position which intensifies the tension. And the letter *m* and *n* are both tonal centers. The word means “the most gracious” and signifies a broader and encompassing manifestation of Divine grace. If we relate the letters to the meaning, the trill of *r* that is articulated with the vowel *a* might be considered to portray an everlasting emanation of Divine grace. The openness of the oral cavity, and the high level of tension and pressure of the letter *h* evokes that the grace is immense, overwhelming, abundant, and very near in proximity. Then, the resolution that takes place on the letter *m* gives a momentary sense of gracious ecstasy of unification, and its prolongation with the open-wide expression of the vowel *a* echoes this union within the all-embracing emanation of grace. And this overwhelming experience of grace finds rest on another harmonious tonal center that of *n*.

In this section, I will focus upon the phrase *bismillāh* (In the name of God). By the very nature of its meaning, the phrase marks the beginnings. Besides, Nursi (2005) and many sufi scholars voice that everything in the universe takes action “in the name of God”, utters it through their “tongues of disposition” and fulfills the tasks which they by themselves are not capable of. Further, it is crucial that the Qur’ān is opened with this phrase as well. All these aspects ultimately evoke the creation of the universe, and accordingly, I will approach the phrase as the primordial dynamic of motion which marks the beginning, the process, and the settlement.

In the word *b-ism* (in/with [His] name), the letter *b* (in/with), whose place of articulation is the same with the tonal center *m*, explodes out of a completely stable point between the lips, which evokes complete darkness, nothingness, eternity and nonlocality. Since both lips are totally involved in the articulation pressurizing against each other as being both active and passive articulators, the impact of the explosion is astonishing and irrepressible. The lips normally have rubber-like and mellow tissue timbre and the articulation of *b* tightens them. Then with the vowel *i* the lips reach their tightest state followed by a most solid explosion. The vowel *i* also narrows down the air-passage expressing the high-pitched impact of the explosion. And the bent position of the tongue which moves up towards the hard palate forms a descending airflow from the top point evoking the vertical release of creation from the station of Divine unity.

The letter *b* expresses a perfectly self-referential explosion and marks the beginning of the creative action. In the entire phrase, there is no other plosive letter. In the articulation of *b*, both lips pressurize one another in a self-sufficient way, which creates an exceptional condition unique to *b*. In this condition, the lips might be considered as both active and passive articulators. This is the exact condition of a believer (or a thing) who acts both by himself and “in the name of God”. Besides, the universe reflects both unity (*wahdah*) and multiplicity (*kasrah*), which might be considered to correspond to the self-referential unification and separation of the lips. In this way, *b* gives us the mystery of creation and Divine unity, and the inexplicable relationship between the Creator and the creature. Many sufi scholars also observe the letter *b* in a similar

fashion. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, while *a* (*alīf*) represents Divine Being (*dāt*), *b* represents His qualities (*ṣifāt*) and symbolizes the first step of creation (*ta’ayyun awwal*), which is in between absolute singularity and multiplicity. And the dot under *b* (ب) represents the station of the “intellect” (*‘aql*) and stands for the universal human (*insan al-kāmil*) and all the beings (El-Hakim 2005).

Furthermore, when it comes to the connection of *b* (in/with) with the word *ism* ([His] name), the semantic and aural aspects converge in an exceptionally remarkable way. The proposition *b* (in/with) is the link between the actor -in this case, *ism* ([His] name)- and the object of intended action or creation. In other words, the *ism* interacts with the object through *b*. In this way, while interpreting the word *ism*, the discussion will focus upon the impact of the explosion caused by the letter *b*. The remarkable point is that the consequences of the explosion, that is the processes of formation and settlement, are expressed through the word *ism*, which means a perfect intertwining of sound and meaning.

In the connection of *b* to *ism*, the *i* of *ism* is assimilated and *b* and its vowel *i* connect to the letters “*sm*” as *bism*. From the letter *b* to *s*, there is a sharp and abrupt change in the airflow and timbre. The tongue moves towards the upper teeth, restricts the airflow, and intensifies it upon the teeth by evoking a sense of friction and solidification. The letter *s* possesses low level of muscle tension, yet it has a sharp and solid quality since it is articulated with the point of the tongue with the upper teeth. Besides, the airflow is fast and turbulent in this unvoiced consonant. These qualities are further emphasized due to the paused position of the letter, and its timbral conspicuity within the entire phrase.

When we consider these qualities together with the impacts of the explosion, the letter *s* expresses a swift, sharp, piercing, and high-pitched process of creation and formation, which gradually slows and cools down, and becomes like a whisper. Then, it merges with, and resolves onto the tonal center *m*, and finds settlement. In this way, the phrase *bism* portrays the universal process of creation, formation and balance. It starts with a creative explosion that is followed by a process of formation and settlement. Accordingly, when the believer utters this phrase he invokes the act of creation.

The connection of the letter *s* with the act of creation and formation also seems to be expressed with the word **sawwā** (to form) in various verses in the Qur’ān. In these verses, the letter *s* is not only found in this word but also powerfully heard within the aural ambiance. It is also critical that these verses are about creation and formation as well. Below I will quote some of these verses:

“huwa l-ladī khalaqa lakum mā fil arḍi jamī’an thumma **s-tawā** ila **s-samā’i fasawwaahunna sab’a samāwāt**; wa huwa bikulli shay’in ‘alīm”. “He it is who has created for you all that is on earth, and has applied His design to the heavens and **fashioned** them into seven heavens; and He alone has full knowledge of everything” (Qur’ān 2: 29)

“wa **nafsin** wa ma **sawwāha**”, “Consider the human self, and how it is **formed** in accordance with what it is meant to be” (Qur’ān 91: 8).

“**sabbi ḥ-isma** rabbika l-a’lā - alladī khalaqa **fasawwā**”, “(1) Extol the limitless glory of thy Sustainer’s name: [the glory of] the All-Highest, (2) who creates [every thing], and thereupon **forms** it in accordance with what it is meant to be” (Qur’ān 87: 1-2)

Allāh

We have interpreted the explosion of *b* from the perspective of *ism* (name). However, since the name and the creation refer to *Allāh*, we need to further interpret the illustrations above accordingly. In this regard, there are several crucial points with regards to the word *Allāh*. First, the word begins with the tonal center *a* and ends with another center *h*. These letters share the same place of articulation. Since all the tonal relations and the tonal meanings of all the letters operate through, and rely on the tonal center, here, the word *Allāh* illustrates the essential and absolute nature of *Allāh*. Besides, as the letters suggest, the creation begins with Him and ends with Him. Among the beautiful names of *Allāh* (*al-asmā ul-ḥusnā*), the names *al-awwal* (The First) and *al-ākhir* (The Last) seem to support such characterization of tonal centers and the creation-formation-settlement triad. Furthermore, as the *m* of *bism* merges with the *l* of *Allāh*, the letter *a* at the beginning is assimilated. It might be suggested that this

assimilation expresses the veiling of *Allāh*. The condition that the creation operates through the letter *b* seems to confirm this point as well. Accordingly, it alludes that the Self (*dāt*) of *Allāh* cannot be observed in His creation as it is. Besides, the assimilation of the beginning letter *a* in the words *al-raḥmān* and *al-raḥīm* further reinforces such allusion.

In addition, the letter *l* holds an exceptional position. In phonetics, it is called “liquid” or “frictionless continuant”, referring to the fluid quality of its sound, and meaning that the closure within the oral cavity does not block the airstream. The exceptional condition is that this is the only position in which an active articulator (the tongue) makes full contact with a passive articulator (the teeth ridge), yet the sound continues to flow. In this way, the liquefied sound quality and the muscle shape of the letter *l* evoke mediation, bridging, and connection between *Allāh* and His creation, which resonates with the mediating role of *b* as well. In this regard, this characterization along with the theme of creation remind the verses “And He it is who has created the heavens and the earth in six aeons; and [ever since He has willed to create life,] the throne of His almightiness has rested upon water...” (Qur’ān 11: 7), and “Are, then, they who are bent on denying the truth not aware that the heavens and the earth were [once] one single entity, which We then parted asunder? - and [that] We made out of water every living thing? Will they not, then, [begin to] believe?” (Qur’ān 21: 30)

According to Ibn al-‘Arabī (2013) the secret of life spreads into the element water and in this particular regard, it is the greatest element. Besides, al-‘Arabī (2013) suggests that even the throne of God (‘arsh) is formed from the water. At this point, Nursi states that the water in the verses above refer to the element ether, and states that (2004, 254):

“...the verse “the heavens and the earth were [once] one single entity, which We then parted asunder?” (21:30) indicates that the earth and the solar system were a sort of dough kneaded by the hand of power out of a simple substance; I mean ether, which compared with beings is a fluid substance that passes through and among them. The verse “the throne of His almightiness has rested upon water” (11:7) alludes to this matter, which resembles water.”

The fluid and frictionless quality of the letter *l* and the relationship of this letter with the word *Allāh* and His throne confirm the descriptions above about the role of ether in the creation. Besides, the connection of *l* to *h* further reinforces such characterization. Here, the critical evocative quality of *h* lies in the process of exhalation in which the breath flows out and spreads, and its heat gradually cools down. Nursi's consideration of the role of ether in the creation corresponds to this setting as well (2004, 254):

“According to the assumptions and theories of modern science, the solar system, together with the heavens in which it floats, were a simple substance which was transformed into a sort of stream. Out of this, some fiery liquescent matter was formed, part of which cooled down and solidified. Then due to its motion the liquescent matter threw off [into space] sparks and pieces which broke up. These became compressed and turned into planets, one of which is our earth.”

The link between the throne of God and the creation is even further strengthened with the verse “...the Most Gracious, established on the throne of His almightiness” (Qur’ān 20: 5). Accordingly, when the process of creation, formation, and settlement is complete, the work and the manifestations of Divine grace and compassion become more apparent. The fruit of the astonishing transformations of creation now provides a welcoming environment for living beings to settle, in which, however, the act of creation is continuously repeated through destructions and formations.

2.

“allāhu waliyyu l-ladīna āmanū yukhrijuhum mina ẓ-ẓulumāti ila n-nūr...”

“God is near unto those who have faith, taking them out of deep darkness into the light...” (Qur’ān 2: 257)

I will focus upon the words *ẓulumāt* (deep darkness) and *nūr* (light), which are in a contrasting position within the verse. The letter *ẓ* has high level of tension, and since the

preceding word connects to *ẓ*, this tension is more emphasized. It depicts heaviness and largeness, however, because the tongue fills the oral cavity without making contact with any tissue, it also evokes being “up in the air”. It is plausible since darkness blocks the light (*nūr*). Besides, the sound vibrates on the teeth and irritates this extremely hard tissue. These elements depict a terrifying ambiance, depressing with threat and horror. Its expression with the vowel *u* further amplifies these qualities by concentrating the airstream within the narrow and circular passage of the lips.

Further, the letter *l* is a liquid consonant. Such fluid quality of *l* in this dark atmosphere evokes a rainstorm whose severity is further enhanced by the powerful *u*. In this way, this scene reminds the verse “Or [the parable] of a violent cloudburst in the sky, with utter darkness, thunder and lightning: they put their fingers into their ears to keep out the peals of thunder, in terror of death; but God encompasses [with His might] all who deny the truth” (Qur’ān 2: 19). Then, when *l* resolves onto the tonal center *m*, whose stability in our case turns into complete darkness and nothingness, in which the person has no more place to move or breath and the sense of time and space completely fades. And this absolute horror is expressed with the open and far-reaching quality of the vowel *ā*. Then, this atmosphere closes with a dense strike of *t* upon the porcelain-like and sensitive tissue of the teeth, depicting a scene of fracture with the pieces scattered around. There are also instances in the Qur’ān in which the letters *ẓ*, *l*, and *t* are found together in similar moments of threat and danger. For instance, “fa andartukum nāran **talazzā**”, “and so I warn you of the **raging** fire” (Qur’ān 92:14).

On the other hand, the qualities of the contrasting word *nūr* (light) appear to be rather obvious. The nasal consonant *n* expresses a harmonious emanation which straightly addresses the one who sees it with the prolonged vowel *ū*. The rounded lip position of *u* here completely resonates with the sources of light, such as the sun. And the rolled consonant *r*, in whose articulation the tip of tongue itself swiftly vibrates, evokes that the light and the heat touch and penetrate to the flesh of the person, and stimulate and vitalize him with a soft and joyful enthusiasm.

3.

“inna l-laḍīna āmanū wa ‘amilu ṣ-ṣāliḥāti lahum jannātun tajrī min taḥtiḥal anḥār; ḍālika l-fawzul kabīr”

“[But,] verily, they who attain to faith and do righteous deeds shall [in the life to come] have gardens through which running waters flow - that triumph most great!” (Qur’ān 85: 11)

The progression of the verse develops through three sections and resolves at the end in both semantic and aural terms illustrating a brilliant musical sentence. The phrase *inna l-laḍīna āmanū wa ‘amilu ṣ-ṣāliḥāti* opens the verse and lays the semantic and formal foundation with a cohesive and decisive tempo, and develops towards the climactic cinematography of the second part *lahum jannātun tajrī min taḥtiḥal anḥār*, which has a more accentuated tempo with an attention-grabbing temporal progression. Finally, these two sections resolve onto the decisive and conclusive praising remark *ḍālika l-fawzul kabīr*, as if the verse praises itself.

Faith and righteous deeds

In this example, I will focus on several words. The word *āmanū* ([they who attain] to faith) consists of three tonal centers, *a*, *m* and *n*. In this way, it evokes a most apparent restfulness, peace and stability with the proclaiming quality of the prolonged vowel *a*. And the last letter *n* is articulated with the vowel *u*, which even further expresses an intense spiritual experience of faith, beauty, and harmony. The word suggests how faith provides peace, serenity, and contentment for the believer. Besides, the connection between the tonal centers *a* and *m* evokes the relationship between the Divine presence and the earth, since the subtle letter *a* has no muscle tension and there is no sense of fleshy obstacle within the oral cavity, and the letter *m* evokes complete corporeality due to the closure of the lips, which mysteriously combines both stability and vibration.

The following phrase is *‘amilu ṣ-ṣāliḥāti* ([who] do righteous deeds). The word *‘amilū* ([they] do) has strong aural and semantic connection with the word *āmanū*, and it

depicts diverse gestures of faithful, righteous and restorative work and action. The word ‘*amilu*, as opposed to the prolonged and stable *ā* of *āmanū* begins with ‘*a*, which has high tension and pressure suggesting heaviness, largeness, and difficulty. However, then, evoking the act of pushing an obstacle up and back, it rapidly resolves onto the light and stable *m*, which is also shared by *āmanū*, and performs a swift, strong, and skillful achievement. The open-wide sense of the vowel *a* also consolidates that this heavy work is done without any hesitation and interruption.

The expression of the balanced *m* with the breaking vowel *i* evokes the interruption of stability suggesting the sacrifice of comfort and contentment for the sake of doing virtuous deeds. As another viewpoint, one might also consider that as the first act of ‘*a* pushes back and neutralizes the pressure and as if it reaches the stable core of the obstacle, now, there is the second act of breaking and eliminating the cause of the obstacle.

Further, the articulation of the liquid *l* highlights another angle of action. As the letter has the distinct quality of fluid mediation and bridging which is expressed through the deep, intense and powerful vowel *u*, it evokes that after breaking the core of the obstacle with the syllable *mi*, now there comes the act of fluid penetration and the establishment of profound and strong connections. In this way, the word ‘*amilu* ultimately expresses transformative action which eliminates the impediments and constructs new bonds and bridges.

Within this framework, in the word *ṣālihāti*, the heavy and pressurized letters *ṣ* and *h* evoke challenge and hardship, yet their expression with the broad and far-reaching vowel *ā* depict monumental accomplishments. Further, in the middle of these letters, the liquid *l* provides the most fluid, comfortable and beautiful alternation possible without overshadowing the strong and mature expression of *ṣā* and *hā*. Besides, the expression with the vowel *i* also illustrates a limitation of continuous flow and vitality, which is however necessary to avoid excessive zeal and to provide wisdom, nobility, and charm. Then, the word resolves onto the letter *t* which almost shares the same place of articulation with the mediative liquid *l* and soft tonal center *n*. This resolution is intriguing as if a door is opened from the end of the word to the Paradise with an

explosion, which resonates with the letter *t* that is repeated for four times while depicting the explosion of rivers in the Paradise.

Gardens through which running waters flow

Furthermore, if we dissect the phrase *jannātun tajrī min taḥtiḥal anḥār* (gardens through which running waters flow), the word *jannātun* (gardens) begins with a unique letter *j*, which is the only affricate in Arabic. It begins like a plosive and continues like a fricative. The letter has a very subtle expressive dynamic. When we consider the Paradise, the letter *j* seems to illustrate a perfect touch of pleasure. The front of the tongue touches to the hard palate and presses until the boundary of explosion, yet, instead, there is a frictional release, which powerfully rubs the tissue in a way that deeply stimulates the hard palate. This quality evokes that the pleasure increases and reaches the climax, yet instead of exploding, it intensely rubs the tissue almost at a level of explosion. In this way, the impact of the friction is deeply permeated into the tissue, which both provides satisfaction and also intensifies the desire.

Further, the letter connects to the harmonious tonal center *n*, which is prolonged due to *tajwīd* regulation as *jannnnnnātun*. This resolution expresses an immense joy and bliss. Then, there is the explosion of *t* with the intense vowel *u*, which again finds settlement upon *n*. The position of *t* between two *n* softens the effect of the solid tissue timbre (teeth), and turns this sharp and stiff explosion into a means of delightful pleasure.

The word *tajrī* (flows) shares the letters *t* and *j* with *jannātun*, and it refers to the flowing waters (*anḥār*). The letters *t* and *j* portrays a bird eye view of explosion and release of flowing waters. And with the letter *r* and its vowel *i*, there is a portrayal of descending motion. Another Qur'ānic verse, which includes these words supports this point: "...wa inna mina l-ḥijārati lamā yatafajjaru minhu l-anḥār...", "...behold, there are rocks from which streams gush forth..." (Qur'ān 2:74) Further, the word *min* (from/through which/beneath which) with two tonal centers adds a harmonious and joyful expectation to this scene. It is articulated as *minnnn*, whose prolongation surrounds the throat with a soft contentment. Then, in the word *taḥtiḥa* (beneath) the letter *t* as suggested before portrays the explosion of waters. Here, *ḥ* evokes a highly pressurized

and heavy flow of waters which is partially released in the first explosion. And the second explosion of *t* comes with an additional breakage of the rocks. This scene is followed by the tonal center *h*, which expresses a total release for the first time with a partial descending motion of air within the lungs. Finally, the word *anhār* with a more powerful release of *hā* which completely empties the breath in the lungs, depicting a scene of immense gushing fountains reaching the ground. All these explosions and flows of water ultimately evoke astonishing spiritual and corporeal pleasures.

4.

“alladīna yunfiqūna fi s-sarrā’i wa ǧ-ǧarrā’i wa l-kāzimīna l-ġayza wa l-‘āfina ‘ani n-nās;
wa l-lāhu yuḥibbu l-muḥsinīn”

“who spend [in His way] in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow-men because God loves the doers of good” (Qur’ān 3:134)

The verse has two conspicuous sections. The semantic and aural point of resolution and therefore the center of the verse is the final phrase *wa l-lāhu yuḥibbu l-muḥsinīn* (God loves the doers of good). Correspondingly, the verse begins by listing the qualities of *al-muḥsinīn* (doers of good) with an accentuated progression. Due to the harmonious internal formal, rhythmic, and phonic formal parallelisms, the tension is suspended and awaits the final resolution without other formal development. Then, the verse expresses a most exuberant and ecstatic resolution of the long-held tension demonstrating an animated intertwining of semantic and musical aspects.⁶

Spending in God’s way

The word *yunfiqūn* (they spend) begins with the liquid consonant *y*, which has low tension and pressure. And it has a fluid and continuous quality similar to the letter *l*. The softness and fluidity of this letter is expressed with the intense vowel *u* which polishes

⁶ It should be noted that this verse complements the previous one which is not quoted above. When the two are recited together, the above descriptions about the expressive character of this verse becomes more clear.

the softness with firmness and maturity. This motion finds resolution and continues on the tonal center *n*, which is nasalized due to *tajwid* regulation as, *yunnnnfiqūn*. In this paused and continuous position of *n*, the harmonious and delicate pleasure of the resolution spreads through the throat. When considered together, these qualities evoke continuous aid and help distributed in a peaceful, soft and decisive manner which gives a joyful spiritual contentment to this group of people.

Afterward, the fricative consonant *f* has low muscle tension, but pressurized and fast airstream. And it is expressed with the vowel *i*, which breaks the air-passage and intensifies the expression. In this regard, the fast airstream of this light consonant *f* which flows out of a narrow passage with a continuous friction depicts that even though the means and channels to spend (in God's way) are narrow and limited, these people effusively spend out of a narrow channel. At that moment, the gentle pressure of the upper teeth onto the soft tissue of the lips expresses a delightful joy. The fastness of airstream joins this lyrical moment.

However, all the letters until now, even though they evoke continuity and therefore decisiveness, also express lightness in weight, smallness in size, and moderation in quantity due to low muscle tension and the largeness of oral cavity. At this point, the letter *q* introduces another angle. This plosive consonant is articulated by the back of the tongue with the soft palate. Although it has high muscle tension and explosive airstream, the tissue of the soft palate gives a mellow timbre. And this weighty and large letter straightly explodes with an intense unification of the airstream with the vowel *u*. Then, it again finds rest on the sweet-sounding tonal center *n*. These movements portray a bountiful and abundant spending which leads to a soothing serenity.

Moreover, the verse states that these people spend both in time of prosperity (*sarrā'*) and difficulty (*ḍarrā'*). These two words have obvious aural parallelism, which confirms that the person continuously spends in either case. The only difference between the words are the letters *s* and *ḍ*, and the tensional difference between them is conspicuous. The letter *s* is light, sharp, solid, and flows with a fast airstream, and joins the energetic *r*. Both letters are emphasized due to pause and gemination. Their articulation with the vowel *a* further expresses their openness. Besides, particularly the sharp quality of the *s*

illustrates that the state of prosperity is keenly and deeply experienced. And the gemination of *r* expresses a rapid and continuous act of spending. On the other hand, the letter *ḍ* with high muscle tension and explosive airstream depicts hardship. However, it also connects to the *r*, and demonstrates that the person spends regardless of difficulties. Besides, for both conditions, the repetitions of the vowel *a* which has an announcing quality further underlines that the prosperity and difficulties of these people are apparent and known.

Restraining the anger

The phrase *wa l-kāẓimīna l-ḡayẓ* ([they] hold in check their anger) has rich depictive potential. I will only focus on the letters *ẓ* and *ḡ*. After the explosive *k* of *kāẓimīn* ([they] hold in check), the tongue moves far back to articulate *ẓ*, performing a motion of restriction. The high muscle tension of *ẓ* demonstrates that it is not that easy. Yet, it further represses the explosion with the vowel *i*. Then, it finds rest in the following tonal centers *m* and *n*. However, even though these people who are loved by Allah do not lose control and suppress their anger, the word *ḡayẓ* (anger) depicts a powerful rage. The letter *ḡ* is heavy and large, and its articulation with the soft palate gives it a soft timbre, which is, in this case, raw and violent. And it is announced with the vowel *a* and fluidly flows with the letter *y* as if the anger flows through the veins. Then, it joins to another heavy and sharp letter *ẓ*. The ambiance depicts a menacing rage that is about to erupt.

Forgiveness

In the phrase *wa l-‘āfīna ‘anī n-nās* (and pardon their fellow-men), the ‘*ā* of the word ‘*āfīna* ([they] pardon) restricts the throat with high muscle tension that expresses heaviness and difficulty. This consonant, particularly when articulated loudly, also has a piercing quality (Gairdner 1925). In this case, it is clearly difficult not to get influenced by whoever breaks the hearts of these people. The following letter *f* also articulated with *i* and restricts the air-passage. Here, the upper teeth press upon the lower lip. While in the *f* of *yunfiqūn* this was an element of pleasure, here it is an element of pain. And the effusion of *f* expresses that the vulnerability of these people slightly flows outside.

However, there is an also gradual decrease in tension from ‘*a* to *f*. Then, when the *f* resolves onto *n*, the relaxation takes place and well-being is restored.

The love of Allāh

In the cadence *wa l-lāhu yuḥibbu l-muḥsinīn* (Allāh loves the doers of good), the *ḥ* of *yuḥibbu* restricts the throat with high tension and pressures. And this is further increased with the narrowness of the vowel *i*. Accordingly, we might suggest that the love of Allāh upon these people is immense, expansive, overwhelming and ecstatic. And this fricative consonant connects to the letter *b* which remains silent for a second during the gemination. Similar to the mystery of the *b* of *bismillāh*, here, there is a unification of the lips which might evoke an intense union with Allāh. It is sublime and awe-inspiring that this union takes place in this cadential resolution section of the verse.

5.

“ihdina ṣ-ṣirāta l-mustaqīm - ṣirāta l-ladīna an’amta ‘alayhim ḡayri l-maḡḍūbi ‘alayhim wala ḍ-ḍāllīn”

“Guide us to the Straight Path. The Path of those whom You have favoured, not of those who have incurred (Your) wrath (punishment and condemnation) and nor of those who are astray.” (Qur’ān 1:6-7)

Finally, I will dissect the word *maḡḍūb* (those who have incurred wrath). The word begins with the tonal center *m*, which is a most stable consonant with no tension. It evokes that in the beginning there is no apparent danger and fear. Then, this stability is radically broken when *m* is connected to *ḡ*, which has high muscle tension and highly turbulent and forceful airflow. The tongue moves back as if it pulls those who have incurred wrath, and compress them in a highly charged and turbulent narrow area. Since the consonant is in a position of pause, the pressure is continuous. Besides, the high and voluminous muscle tension of *ḡ* evokes heaviness and largeness, and therefore closeness in distance. Here, the tissue quality of the soft palate is also sensitive and

vulnerable. Accordingly, this setting evokes an overwhelming torment which penetrates into the most fragile depths of the self.

Within the transition from the fricative \bar{g} to the plosive d , the narrow air-passage of \bar{g} becomes even narrower. And when tongue takes its position for d , that passage is totally closed. The transition from a highly tense and heavy letter to another pushes the tension to the climax. Then, d , which is a highly tense, explosive, heavy, large and proximate plosive consonant, explodes in a straight direction with the vowel u in its most powerful and concentrated expression. And it hits the hard tissue of teeth-ridge evoking complete destruction and banishment. Finally, when d is connected to b , the resolution occurs as b shares the same place of articulation with the peaceful and complete tonal center m .

4. Concluding Remarks

In the classical Qur'ānic scholarship, the language of the Qur'ān had been characterized around eloquence (*balāḡah*) and articulacy (*fasāḥah*) of composition (*naẓm*). Sells (1991) charted the progressive dynamics of its formal harmony. Qutb (2011) propounded that it is vividly depictive. Nelson mentioned that it is “almost onomatopoeic” (2001, 13). It might also be suggested that it is kinesthetic and synesthetic as well. However it is described, it appears that the enchantment, miraculousness and inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'ānic language, and essentially of the Divine speech, lie primarily in the intertwining of sound and meaning. It is intriguing that in the modern and contemporary scholarship the sound-meaning interaction has been predominantly explored by utilizing musical tools and thinking, which, however, has not extended to systematizing the study of sound and meaning on such musical basis. In this regard, the attempt of this mini-dissertation has been, first, to discuss that modern and contemporary approaches to sound and meaning in the Qur'ān implicitly or explicitly revolve around musicality and particularly the tonal and progressive dynamics of harmony. And second, it has aimed to complete and construct a comprehensive inner musical approach to sound-meaning interaction by entering into the complex evocative domain of the letters and their intricate and elusive relationships. I hope that the implications of such venture for the Qur'ānic scholarship would be meaningful. And I ultimately aspire that the study of sound and meaning paves the way for the development of the psychological hermeneutics of the Qur'ān.

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